

golden like daylight by 70sBabe

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Summary:

the story of Eddie/Richie, told through the tracks of Taylor Swift's album Lover

1. i forgot that you existed

And I would've stuck around for ya

Would've fought the whole town, so yeah

Friends.

Eddie likes that word, likes the fullness of it, the way it slides easily off the tongue, the warm feeling it gives him anytime he hears it.

He has friends, real friends, for what feels like the first time in his stupid, asthmatic life, and it feels fucking incredible.

Bill, with the stutter and the steady gaze. Stan, who rarely laughs, but when he does, it's fucking loud and long. Ben, who always shares his Jujubes. Bev, with her soft hands and fierce eyes. Mike, the calming presence in their little club.

And Richie. Trashmouth. Eddie's best friend, though he rolls his eyes so much when Richie talks, it feels like they'll fall out one of these days.

Friends. Real friends, friends who are there when you need them, and there when you don't (although Eddie knows there'll never be a time when he doesn't need his friends).

And the best thing about these friends? Well, they're always there to help you when you're getting the shit kicked out of you.

"Fucking baby," Bowers spit, his breath labored as he pulled Eddie back to his feet, only to shove him back down again. "Come on, get up! Get up!"

"Fuck....off," Eddie hissed through clenched teeth. The heels of his hands were bloody and filled with gravel from all the times he tried to catch himself as Bowers pushed him to the ground.

"Oh, looks like someone's got some fucking balls!" Bowers laughed,

looking back over his shoulder at his buddies. Belch and Vic were laughing, too. Belch was eating the Snickers bar Eddie had been holding when they found him.

“Asshole,” Eddie sighed, bracing himself for the next punch, the next kick, the next pain.

“What’d you say, you little pussy?” Bowers narrowed his eyes.

“I do believe he called you an asshole,” a vaguely British voice called from behind them. “But I think I would have gone with ‘ *limp-dick* asshole.’”

Eddie grinned almost reflexively. He knew that voice.

“Fucking four-eyes,” Bowers swore, already turning away from Eddie and towards Richie, who was standing a few feet away and smiling like they were all great pals, like they were just horsing around.

Eddie took this opportunity to scramble to his feet, ready to cut and run as soon as he figured out what the hell Richie had planned.

“Language, Mr. Bowers!” Richie said in mock-horror. “Wouldn’t want me to wash that mouth out with soap, would you?” He was fiddling with something behind his back and Eddie really fucking hoped it was a weapon and not one of his stupid prank toys.

Vic and Belch were also walking towards Richie. It was like everyone forgot Eddie was there. Richie and his big mouth sort of had that effect on people.

“You little dick hea-”

Bowers’ insult was abruptly cut off by an old baseball slamming directly into his nose. Richie had always had a good arm.

“Motherfucker!” Bowers hollered, blundering forward blindly, still trying to fight through the blood pouring out of his nose and down his face. “Fucking shithead, I’ll fucking get you!”

But Eddie and Richie were already gone, tearing down the street and cutting across the vacant lot on Compton before Vic and Belch could

even blink. They stopped at the bottom of the hill on Ashwood, both breathing hard and fast.

Eddie looked up and caught Richie's eye and suddenly they were both wheezing with laughter. Richie clapped a hand on Eddie's shoulder for support, his entire body shaking with the sound of his giggles.

"Fucking hell, Eds," he finally choked out. "The look on his face when I hit him!"

"Motherfucker!" Eddie said in a weak imitation of Bowers' voice, but it was enough to make them both double over again.

"Ah, Eds" Richie sighed, throwing an arm around Eddie's shoulder. "Never a dull moment with you, huh?"

They started walking down the street, Richie's arm still wrapped around Eddie's shoulder. He liked how it felt; the warmth, the weight. He liked spending time with Richie.

"Hey, Rich?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Thanks," Eddie said, unsure of how to put his feelings into words. "For.....for, uh, helping me. For fighting them."

Richie looked down at him, an uncharacteristic softness stealing over his sharp features. He quickly snapped a smile onto his face.

"Eddie, my boy," he raised an eyebrow. "Surely you must know by now that I'd fight the whole damn town for ya."

"Shut up," Eddie shoved him lightly, a grin on his face. Richie tugged him closer and ruffled his hair, which Eddie usually hated.

Today, he didn't really mind it all that much.

2. cruel summer

Killing me slow, out the window

I'm always waiting for you to be waiting below

"I'm not sick, okay? I'm just tired. Me and Bill-

"Bill and I."

Richie sighed. " *Bill and I* biked all the way across town and back today. Yes, I have the boundless energy of youth, but I need to recharge."

"Fine, fine," his mother shook her head, a small smile on her face. "Looks like me and your father won't be fighting you for the remote this evening."

"Don't you mean your father and *I*?" Richie grinned before darting up the stairs. He closed his bedroom door and flopped down on his bed. *One hour. Just gotta wait one hour* .

One hour is an extremely long time for a kid like Richie. In about 20 years, people are gonna start throwing the words "attention deficit disorder" at him, but for right now, he's just "very energetic!" At least, that's how his mom puts it. Everyone else calls him "fucking annoying."

Even the Losers do, but there's no bite to it. Richie likes the way they smile when they tell him to shut up, the way that Ben always chuckles when he says "Beep-beep, Richie," or the smile that Bev tries to hide when Richie starts doing one of his voices. He especially likes the way Eddie sighs at everything he says; nicknames, voices, your-mom jokes. Sometimes, Eddie laughs and Richie likes that, too. He even likes it when Eddie smacks him on the arm after a particularly gross joke about his mom.

Alright, so he pretty much likes whatever Eddie does.

Eddie is his best friend. Sure, they've got the whole Losers Club, but Richie likes the way he feels with Eddie. He likes how Eddie goes from yelling at him to shut up, to painstakingly picking the gravel out of his knees when he trips and goes flying, and back to yelling again when Richie smacks a kiss on his forehead.

Richie rolled over onto his stomach, blindly reaching for one of the comic books he kept stacked by his bed. *Might as well do something to kill time* . He was just getting to the good part of the latest Spider-Man when he heard a rattle at his window. *Oh, thank God* .

He grabbed his backpack, already stocked with junk food, cigarettes, and a flashlight, and lunged towards the window, throwing it open to see -

"Why, as I live and breathe," he affected a fluttery, Southern belle tone. "Do my eyes deceive me, or is that Mr. Edward Kaspbrak throwing rocks at my window?"

"Get your ass down here," Eddie grumbled.

"I thought Stan was on Richie-duty tonight," Richie said, already clambering out the window. He held his breath before dropping to the ground and landing in an untidy heap at Eddie's feet.

"We did rock-paper-scissors. Guess who won?"

"You."

"Guess again."

"You."

Eddie just rolled his eyes, but Richie could see the hint of a smile on his little face. A few more well-timed jokes and Richie knew he could have him in stitches by the time they reached the quarry.

That was the destination tonight. One last camp-out before summer was over and school started back up again. Richie was glad Eddie lost rock-paper-scissors. Stan was one of his best friends, but he really made him work for his laughs and Richie was in a lazy mood. Eddie was an easy target.

"How'd your mom even let you out tonight, anyways?" He cut a glance at Eddie, watching his shoulders tense up at the mention of his mom before slowly relaxing.

"Snuck out, same as everyone else," he shrugged.

"Aw, look at my little Eds," Richie cooed, pinching his cheek. "All grown up and breaking the rules."

"Get off!"

"You love it."

"I don't."

"Your mom loves it."

"Beep-beep, Richie."

Richie fell silent, listening to the sound of their sneakers slapping against the pavement, the crickets chirping in the night, the wheeze of Eddie's inhaler as he took a hit.

"Do you think...." Eddie stopped, not looking at Richie.

"Do I think what?"

"Nothing."

"Come on, what's up, Eds?"

"Do you think we'll have some classes together this year?" Eddie said, all in a rush, like he was forcing himself to spit it out.

"Well, sure I do," Richie said slowly, sensing that Eddie was being very serious.

"Good." Eddie sighed. "I just.....I don't want things to change. I know we were all close this summer; killing a fucking demon clown will do that, you know? But I'm afraid you'll all go away once we're back in school, or it just won't be the same and-"

"Hey, hey, slow down!" Richie put his hands on Eddie's shoulders,

forcing him to look into his eyes. “Eddie, no one’s going anywhere. Least of all, me.”

“You mean it?”

“It’s you and me, babe,” Richie punched him lightly on the shoulder. “I’m like an STD: hard to get rid of.”

“Ugh, gross, Richie!”

The heavy mood hanging over them was gone by the time they reached the quarry. Richie could hear Bill and Mike whooping and Bev laughing. He was sure Stan was watching the proceedings with a good natured smile on his face and Ben was staring at Bev, a lovesick expression on his face.

“Hey,” Richie stopped Eddie before they pushed through the brush towards their friends. “I really did mean it, you know? I’m not.....I’ll be here.”

“I know,” Eddie smiled.

“Even if the whole world moves on,” Richie put on the Southern belle voice again. “I’ll still be waiting at my window for you, darling.”

“Okay, Miss Scarlett.”

“I fucking *knew* you’d seen *Gone With the Wind* , you little turd!”

3. lover

And you'll save all your dirtiest jokes for me

And at every table, I'll save you a seat

"Can't you just let me copy off you?"

"If I let you copy the homework, you'll never learn how to actually do it!"

"Christ, Stan, it's just pre-algebra," Beverly groaned.

"If you can't get pre-algebra, then how are you gonna take algebra next year?" Stan sniffed primly, poking a fork into the mac and cheese the caf was serving today.

"Stanley, I swear to *God* -"

"Ch-children, children!" Bill laughed, putting a hand on Bev's shoulder. "L-l-let's all c-calm d-down."

"I'll let you copy off me," Ben said shyly. Eddie restrained himself from rolling his eyes. Ben was so in love with Bev, it was sickening. If Richie was here, Eddie knew he'd be making puking noises, but he'd been kept after class for talking back to the teacher, so Eddie was alone in his disgust.

Well, maybe disgust was the wrong word. Eddie thought it was nice that Ben loved Bev, but it just seemed.....embarrassing. I mean, everyone knew, even Bev, and how *awful*, to have your most secret and personal feelings put on display for anyone who was looking and-

"Salutations!" Richie was still halfway across the cafeteria, but (like always) he had felt the need to yell across the room, halting conversations for a few seconds before everyone realized it was just the geek with the big mouth.

He was still grinning when he got to their table. "God, I love doing that, it drives those assholes crazy that they actually had to notice me."

"Just sit down," Stan shook his head. "Lunch'll be over in 15 minutes and you need to eat something."

"Stanley the Manley, always looking out for his favorite boy!" Richie swooned. He was in the process of scanning the table for a seat when Eddie waved to get his attention, then pointed at the seat next to him.

"I take it back, I think I'm Edward's favorite boy."

"Shut up," Eddie rolled his eyes as Richie slumped down in the chair next to him. "I always save you a seat, you know that."

"Ah, y-yes, b-b-because our t-table is s-s-so cr-cr-owded." Bill laughed, gesturing at the handful of empty seats around them.

"It's the thought that counts, Billy Boy," Richie grinned as he ripped the lid off his applesauce. "And Eds here is always thinking of me."

"Beep-beep."

The conversation swirled around them, Bev and Stan still bickering over the math homework, when Richie leaned over and said, "Oh, hey, I've got a new one for ya."

"Aw, geez-"

"No, no, I promise it's a good one!"

"Okay, but remember, I'm eating."

"Okay," Richie paused for dramatic effect. "What's the difference between a tire and 365 used condoms?"

"Jesus Christ-"

"One's a *good* year, and the other's a *great* year!" And with that, Richie was gone, cackling uncontrollably at his own joke, glasses

sliding down his nose. Eddie was suddenly overcome with the urge to gently push them back up into place himself, but he didn't. He never did.

"You're an idiot," Eddie finally said, although there was no malice in his voice. In fact, if any of the other Losers had been listening, they would have said he almost sounded.....fond.

"Aw, you love it," Richie smiled, before shoving a forkful of macaroni into his mouth. "You know I save all my best jokes for you," he mumbled around a mouthful of food.

"If that was one of your best jokes, then I really don't think a career in comedy is something you should be pursuing."

"Fuck you!"

"Fuck *you* !"

"Boys, behave yourselves!" Bev called from the other end of the table, a twinkle in her eye.

"Yes, ma'am!" Richie snapped a salute, then went back to his lunch.

Eddie rolled his eyes, before looking back at his friends. Bev was telling a story or something and Ben was staring at her, a small smile on his face. *He's so damn obvious* .

He looked back at Richie, who was now gargling with his chocolate milk. He smiled again and, although he didn't know it, it was a carbon copy of the look that Ben had on his face.

4. the man

And it's okay if you're mad

Richie liked talking. Duh, right? But he did. He liked filling the space around him with words, banishing silence and creating whatever he damn well pleased, all with just the sound of his voice.

If you asked anyone who knew him, they'd say he didn't know when to quit, and that was true, too. That's why his friends had adopted the phrase "beep-beep:" a way to shut him up without being cruel.

Tonight, though, he knew enough to keep his damn mouth shut until Eddie started talking.

He had come down to the clubhouse to retrieve a bag of Sour Patch Kids he'd left there yesterday, but all thoughts of candy flew from his mind (well, maybe not *all* thoughts of candy; he just really fucking loves Sour Patch Kids, okay?) when he saw Eddie sitting in the hammock. This wouldn't be too unusual, except for the fact that Eddie wasn't *doing* anything. He was just sitting there, arms crossed tightly and a stormy look on his face.

"Hey," Richie said, a sixth sense telling him that now was not the time for his James Dean impression.

Eddie didn't say anything.

Richie started rifling through the stacks of junk they kept in the clubhouse, as if he was looking for something. All a charade; and the Oscar goes to.....Richie Tozier! He knew exactly where the damn candy was, but he figured if he hung out down here long enough, Eddie would crack and say what was bothering him.

"Doo doo doo," he sang tunelessly and nonsensically under his breath. "Looking for the candy, yessiree, looking for the candy-"

"You're a terrible singer."

“Well, who died and made you Clive Davis?”

“Who?”

“Not important.”

“Your jokes should probably make references to people who are *actually* well known.”

“Clive Davis is one of the - no, you know what? Not important.”

Richie stared at Eddie, waiting for him to meet his eyes.

“I can feel you staring at me, asshole.”

“I’m not *staring*,” Richie groaned. “I”m.....gazing.”

“Well, gaze somewhere else.”

“Alright, what the fuck is up with you today?” Richie couldn’t take anymore of this dancing around the elephant in the room. “I mean, you’re always a little pissy, but you’re taking the fucking cake today, Eds.”

“I don’t have asthma.” He said it quietly, matter-of-factly, as if he was commenting on the weather.

“You.....wait, what? What the *fuck* ?” Richie felt like his brain was moving too fast. Error, error, does not compute. Eddie Kaspbrak without the asthma was like peanut butter without the jelly; incomplete.

“I don’t have asthma,” Eddie repeated, his hands fidgeting in his lap.

“Wait, so you’ve been faking this whole time? You little-”

“I wasn’t faking, asshole!” Eddie finally looked at Richie, eyes blazing. “I thought I had it and then - and then I went to the pharmacy and Mr. Keene - he said it was fake medicine, like a - like a gazebo or something-”

“Placebo,” Richie quietly corrected him.

“Whatever!” Eddie threw his hands in the air. “And if the medicine is fake then - then-”

“Then your mom’s a fucking liar.”

“Fuck you! Don’t talk about my mom like that, you don’t know anything!”

“Eddie, she’s been lying to you!” Richie didn’t understand why Eddie would want to defend her. Sonia Kaspbrak had always been overbearing and meddlesome and Richie had never liked her, but this was the icing on an already over-decorated cake. I mean, if *he* had found out he didn’t have any of the mysterious illnesses he’d thought he’d had all this time, he’d be fucking livid! He’d never talk to his mom again!

“Maybe she didn’t know it was fake,” Eddie stood up and started pacing. “Maybe.....maybe the doctors have been tricking her! Trying to make money off her or something!”

“Eddie.”

“She would never do this on purpose,” Eddie turned to look at Richie, eyes full of uncertainty and a little fear. Sure, they’d spent the majority of this summer trying to figure out how to beat the shit out of a killer clown, but this was almost scarier. Eddie’s whole world was collapsing around him and he couldn’t accept that it was his mom’s doing.

“Eddie-”

“She wouldn’t! She couldn’t do this to me, I know. It’s not her fault.”

“Eddie.” Richie had crossed the room at this point, putting his hands on Eddie’s shoulders to get him to stop moving.

“She’s my mom,” Eddie said simply and Richie knew what he meant. Blaming your parents for shit gets a lot easier once you hit adulthood, but as a kid? It seems impossible that the people who are supposed to love you more than anything can be the ones who hurt you the most.

“You can still be mad at her, you know. It’s okay to be mad.”

And suddenly Eddie was wrapping his arms around Richie, squeezing him so tightly he could hardly breathe. Richie patted him carefully on his back, worried that maybe he broke Eddie’s brain because Eddie *hated* being touched.

After a couple seconds, Eddie slowly disentangled himself from Richie, looking sheepish.

“Sorry,” he said softly, looking at the ground.

“Nothing to be sorry about, my good sir,” Richie went for the tried-and-true British accent. “Just one of the many services I offer.”

“What other services could you possibly have to offer anyone?”

“Well, your mom really likes it when I-”

“No! No! Do not fucking finish that thought!”

Richie had a feeling the storm had passed, at least for now. He was glad. He liked it when Eddie smiled. And you know what? The hug had felt.....nice. Richie wouldn’t mind talking Eddie down from another ledge if it meant he would latch onto him like a fucking koala bear again.

5. the archer

'Cause cruelty wins in the movies

Movie night with the Losers had become a sort of tradition. They tried to rotate who got to pick the movie each time, but no matter what was chosen, there was always a fight. Bill and Bev would argue over the “chick flicks” she chose (“*Sixteen Candles* is not a chick flick, Bill, it’s fucking funny!”), or Richie would start making farting noises during one of Stan’s WWII movies.

Eddie loved the chaos of it. At his house, movies were watched quietly, both him and his mother sitting still on the couch. With the Losers, there was always talking and shushing and food being thrown and Bev or Richie begging someone to pause the movie so they could go out back and smoke. It was loud and messy, but it felt like a family in a way that Eddie had never really known.

“All of the movies at the freakin’ rental place,” Bev shook her head. “And you go with some black-and-white shit?”

“It’s a *classic*,” Richie crossed his arms. “Cary Grant, Rosalind Russell-”

He was interrupted by the sound of Mike and Stan making fake snoring noises.

“Aw, fuck you guys,” Richie flipped a lazy bird, but he was smiling.

A little-known fact about Richie: he loved screwball comedies. He was always forcing Clark Gable and Katherine Hepburn on them, cackling gleefully as everyone on screen swapped insults at dizzying speeds.

Eddie didn’t mind them, but it was funny to think of Trashmouth Tozier liking the same kind of movies his mom did. Tonight, Richie had chosen *His Girl Friday*, and the rest of the Losers were doing their best to dissuade him. It wasn’t even that they were that opposed

to the movie; it was just tradition to talk shit about whatever movie got picked.

“All I do is try to bring some culture into your godforsaken lives,” Richie was soliloquizing now, one hand over his heart, his voice getting louder and louder to try and drown out the fake puking noises everyone else was making. “And this is how you godless heathens repay me? It’s enough to make a man cry.”

“Just put the movie on,” Mike laughed, tossing Ben the bag of Twizzlers.

As much as everyone complained, they were hooked on the movie after a couple minutes. Hell, even Stan was laughing.

Richie, as always, was sitting next to Eddie, turning to make sure he was laughing at “all the right parts,” as Richie put it.

After the movie ended, they all split up, walking home in groups of two or three. They had beaten It, but the paranoia still remained. Better to stick together. There was strength in their numbers.

“See you Monday!” Richie hollered, waving sloppily at Bev, Ben, and Bill. He turned back to grin at Eddie. “Ready to blow this popsicle stand, old buddy, old pal?”

“Where do you even come up with this stuff?” Eddie huffed. Richie was a tornado of flailing limbs and phrases that didn’t really make sense and jokes that didn’t quite land. He was a disaster, but the Losers all liked to think that he was *their* disaster.

“Oh, I’m just a genius, I guess.”

“Yeah, I’m sure our teachers would agree.”

“They’re just jealous,” Richie shook his head. “They know I’m on Einstein-levels of smartness.”

“Idiot.”

“You wound me, Eds.”

“Don’t fucking call me that, asshole!”

“Yowza!” Richie staggered, both hands pressed over his stomach, before dropping to the ground in front of Eddie. “You.....you got me good, Eds,” he moaned, before closing his eyes. Eddie stood there impatiently before nudging Richie with the toe of his shoe.

“Get up, numb-nuts, my mom’ll freak if we’re late.”

Richie shot up like a jack-in-the-box, walking on like nothing had happened. They continued down the street, Richie kicking at any rocks that crossed his path while Eddie rolled his eyes. They were almost to Eddie’s house when Richie broke the silence.

“So, what did you really think of the movie?”

“I liked it,” Eddie shrugged. “It was funny.”

“I like the way they all talk in those movies,” Richie sighed.

“Yeah, ‘cause they’ve all got serious motormouth issues,” Eddie snorted. “You feel right at home.”

“But they’re funny, too, *really* funny,” Richie has a strange, almost-sincere tone to his voice, and it’s enough to make Eddie stop walking and really pay attention to what he’s saying because Richie was a lot of things, but rarely serious.

“They’re also kinda mean,” Eddie pointed out. “I mean, Cary Grant and what’s-her-name-”

“Rosalind Russell.”

“-were supposed to be in love or something, but all they did was make fun of each other and, like, tell each other to shut up,” Eddie shrugged, suddenly not sure of where he was going with all of this.

“Aww, kinda sounds like you and me, Eds!” Richie’s eyes lit up, an almost too-wide smile stretching across his face. “I can see it now: me, a wisecracking newspaper editor, you, my tough-talking right hand man. We’d be the toast of the town, babe!”

“Shut up,” Eddie laughed, lightly shoving Richie’s shoulder.

“Ooh, I love it when you get rough with me, Eddie, baby.”

“You’re disgusting.”

“Keep talking like that, we’ll end up like Walter and Hildy.”

“In your dreams, dumbass.”

“You got that right, Eds.”

6. i think he knows

I think he knows

Bev and Richie had a special sort of kinship. Maybe it was the fierce independent streak they both sported. Maybe it was the fuck-you-and-the-horse-you-rode-in-on attitude they shared, the one that made teachers mark them as trouble before they even opened their mouths.

Or maybe it was just that they both smoked cigarettes.

“You owe me,” Bev paused to inhale from the cigarette she held delicately between her fingers. “I’ve provided the cancer sticks for the past 2 weeks.”

“Gimme a break, my parents are withholding allowance until I get my history grade back up to snuff,” Richie took a drag of his own, reveling in the slight burn in his throat as he exhaled.

“If you’d just focus.....” Bev said under her breath. Richie pretended he didn’t hear her. He knew he was smart. Not in a show-offy, brown nose, bootlicker kind of way. Just.....smart. Knew his stuff without having to work too hard for it. The problem was, he couldn’t make himself sit still or keep his trap shut long enough to let the smarts come out. Hence, the bad grades. Hence, the no allowance. Hence, Bev’s exasperation.

“Hey, Bev?”

“Yes, darling?”

“Can I ask you something?” Richie cursed his puberty-stricken self for making his voice crack on “ask.” *This must be how Bill feels .*

“No, I don’t think your dick is bigger than Stan’s.”

“Har har.”

“What’s up?” She turned to face him, her back pressed against the brick wall of the gym.

“Do you.....” he stopped, unsure of how to proceed. “Um, how do you know when you, uh.....when you like someone?”

“Is this a bit, or are you actually asking?”

“Actually asking.”

“Alright, then,” Bev pressed her lips together, brow furrowed as she turned the topic over in her mind.

Richie fiddled with the cigarette in his hand while he waited. This wasn’t the question he’d really meant to ask, but that one had stuck in his throat like a glob of peanut butter and he couldn’t manage to choke it out.

“I think you know when you like someone,” Bev said carefully. “When you just want to.....be with them. You want good things for them. You want them to be happy, no matter the circumstances. I don’t know, does that clear things up for you?”

“Sort of,” Richie shrugged, taking another drag. He exhaled shakily and then said, “Bev, I think that maybe I like, uh, maybe I like.....boys.”

He could feel Bev’s eyes on him but he didn’t meet her gaze. He couldn’t. *Why the fuck did I even say anything? What was I thinking? Jesus Christ, another fucking mess of my own making.*

“Hey, Rich?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you look at me?”

He slowly lifted his head, scared of what he might see in her face. And in her face was.....love. Fondness. Caring. None of the scary things he’d imagined.

“Thanks for telling me,” she said quietly. It was the tone of her voice,

the soft acceptance, that made Richie throw his arms around her neck and pull her into a messy embrace.

“Aw, Bevs, I loves ya, I does,” he crowed in a Cockney accent (something he’d picked up after too many viewings of *Mary Poppins* as a child).

“Get off!” She shrieked as he ruffled her hair.

“You still love me, don’t ya?” Richie was half-joking, half-serious, which is why Bev put a hand to his cheek and said, “Course I do, dummy.”

They didn’t say anything else; just finished up their cigarettes and started walking back towards the school. Free period was almost over.

“I, uh, I still like girls, too,” Richie said suddenly. “I don’t - I don’t know what that means, but, uh, yeah. I like ‘em both.”

“You’re an equal opportunist,” Bev said with a wicked smirk. Richie’s mouth dropped open before he absolutely dissolved into laughter.

“Bev Marsh gets off a good one, ladies and gents! An absolute zinger!”

“Shut up!”

“You’re lucky I like ‘em all, Beverly,” Richie snickered. “That means you’ve still got a shot at the famous Tozier wang. I mean, songs have been sung about it, memorials erected-”

“The only time your dick has ever been erect.”

“You’re killing me, Bev, you’re killing me!”

Both of them were lost in helpless giggles, halfway to the school doors and hanging off each other’s arms, trying to stay upright as their bodies shook with laughter. *It was the sort of laughter that only comes from relief that’s so sweet it hurts your teeth*, Richie thinks. They barely even noticed when the bell rang and the doors burst open, a steady flow of kids streaming out and around them.

“What’s so funny?” And suddenly Eddie was there, hair a little messy from having to fight through the crowded hallways and arms wrapped tightly around his science textbook.

“Bev here is just giving me a run for my money in the jokes department,” Richie tried to catch his breath, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes.

“Aw, geez, we don’t need another Richie,” Eddie groaned.

“Yeah, but I’m actually funny.”

“Okay, true.”

“Hey, I’m right here!”

“Come on, it’s almost time for sixth period,” Eddie tugged at Richie’s sleeve. “This geology unit is killing me, I need you to explain everything to me after Ms. Long does the lesson.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m coming,” Richie rolled his eyes. “Can’t have little Eds flunking out of Derry High, huh?” He pinched Eddie’s cheek and, wonder of wonder, miracle or miracles.....Eddie smiled. He didn’t yell or groan or shove Richie away or say “Fuck you.” He smiled. Richie felt like the bottom just dropped out of the entire world, his heartbeat hammering out the rhythm to “Stayin’ Alive” (fuck Bill, the Bee Gees were incredible).

“Just hurry up, okay?” And then he was gone, slipping between the double doors of the school, leaving Richie frozen.

“Bev?”

“Yeah?” She said, and Richie could hear the laughter threatening to break through in her voice.

“You know when I asked how you *know* when you like someone?”

“Yep.”

“How do you *tell* someone you like them?”

“Oh, Richie,” she said slowly, grabbing his hand and towing him toward the school. “I think he knows.”

“He better fucking not!”

7. miss americana and the heartbreak prince

You play stupid games, you win stupid prizes

“This is ridiculous.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Alright, this is idiotic.”

“You’re just mad because you’re losing.”

“Fuck you!”

“Can’t; I’m too busy fucking your mom.”

“Beep-beep, Richie,” the entire room chorused.

“Persecuted,” Richie moaned, flopping onto his back. “That’s what I am: persecuted.”

“J-j-just shut up and b-bet,” Bill nudged him lightly with the toe of his shoe.

The gang (minus Bev and Mike) were in the clubhouse, playing (much to Eddie’s chagrin) Texas Hold ‘Em. Ben had taught them all how to play last week and everyone was hooked; everyone, that is, except Eddie.

“Why can’t we just play Monopoly?” Eddie sighed. “I’m good at Monopoly.”

“Yeah, because you get so intense about it, we just let you win,” Stan said, not looking up from the hand of cards he was studying. “Raise.” He pushed two Jolly Ranchers towards the center of the circle.

“What’s the exchange rate of Jolly Ranchers to temporary tattoos?” Richie squinted down at his own pile of junk.

“J-j-j-just put d-down two.”

“Whatever you say, Big Bill.”

“You’re not supposed to be helping each other,” Ben rolled his eyes. “It’s an every-man-for-himself kinda game.”

“Well, look who’s gone and gotten all heartless on us!” Richie moaned. “Haystack, you wound me, you really do.”

“Shut up,” Ben shook his head, but Eddie could tell he was pleased. Even though Richie’s bits sucked, it always felt nice when he did one with you. Like you were part of something. Like you belonged.

“Eddie, your turn,” Stan sounded impatient. He took every game seriously, but his commitment to Texas Hold ‘Em was starting to get a little out of hand.

“What’s the point?” Eddie groaned. “I’m just gonna end up losing.”

“Eddie, c-come on.”

Eddie sighed, looking morosely at his cards. Nothing. Zip. Zilch. Nada. He was gonna lose an entire box of Mallomars, just like he lost that sparkly blue bouncy ball last Saturday. *Why can’t we just play fucking Monopoly?*

“Raise.”

Eddie glanced at Richie, who was staring intently at his own cards and pretending he hadn’t just said something.

“What?” he whispered back.

“Raise,” Richie hissed. Bill and Stan were talking about some history paper that was due next week and Ben was following along, so no one noticed Richie and Eddie’s hushed conversation.

“Don’t fuck with me, okay?”

“Just fucking raise, Eddie,” Richie sounded frustrated. “Stan is bluffing, Bill and Ben both have a pair, at best. Fake ‘em out.”

Eddie opened his mouth to deliver some clever comeback, like maybe “fuck you!,” but stopped. What did he have to lose by following Richie’s directions? He *was* pretty good.

“You better not screw me over, Rich.”

“Have I ever steered you wrong?”

“Constantly.”

Regardless, Eddie wordlessly shoved 4 Mallomars into the center pile.

“Wow, r-real b-b-big s-sp-spender!” Bill smiled. Stan didn’t say anything; just furrowed his brow and stared at his cards again, like if he looked at them long enough, he could change it into a more favorable hand. Eddie choked back a laugh. Richie could apparently read them all like a fucking book.

And he kept reading them all, too.

The rest of the game was spent with Richie surreptitiously hissing instructions to Eddie. Ben folded first, then Bill, but Stan seemed determined to win.

“Well, boys, I’m tapped,” Richie threw his cards down dramatically. “Highway robbery! How *do* you sleep at night?”

“Shut up, Richie,” Stan mumbled. Eddie was starting to get nervous.

“This is getting intense,” Ben whispered. Bill just nodded.

From what Eddie had gleaned from Richie’s whispers, Stan had nothing. Neither did Eddie. At this point, it was a battle of the wills and Eddie was gonna win or die trying. He was gonna win that giant pile of stupid shit in the middle of the table and then everyone would have to stop making fun of him for sucking at cards.

“Stan the Man, is that a bead of sweat dripping from your chiseled brow?” Richie wiggled in his seat. “You worried Eds is gonna take the pot?”

"You're not even in the game anymore, you're not allowed to trash talk," Stan snapped.

"S-someone's d-d-defensive," Bill snickered. "S-s-scared, Stan?"

"There's no way you're not bullshitting me right now," Stan narrowed his eyes at Eddie. "You *have* to be bluffing."

"Then why do you look so nervous?" Eddie grinned.

Stan bit his lower lip, looking from his cards to Eddie's face. Eddie prayed he could keep his poker face in place. After a few tense moments of dead silence, Stan finally slammed his cards down.

"Alright, fine, I fucking fold!" He exploded. "Fuck if I know why because I know you've got a shitty hand, I fucking know it!"

"Stanny boy, don't be a sore loser," Richie elbowed him lightly. "It's unattractive and how ever will you attract a wealthy suitor if you're behaving unattractively?"

"One of these days I'm gonna hit you, I swear."

"Ooh, yes, you know I like it rough."

"B-beep-beep, Richie."

"Show me your cards," Stan said as Eddie started to rake the pile of candy and toys towards him. Eddie smiled and put down his cards.

"I fucking knew it!" Stan yelled. "You fucking asshole!"

"The point is to bullshit people," Ben said. "It's not like he cheated."

"Aww, Stanley here is just mad he lost an entire pack of Bubble Yum."

"Yeah, you're fucking right, I am."

They all headed home afterwards (Stan was not in the mood to be around people), Richie escorting Eddie, like he always did. Eddie had stopped wondering why.

"The look on Stan's face when he realized he folded for your crappy hand," Richie sighed dreamily. "That's gonna keep me warm on many a cold Derry night."

"Oh, so *that's* why you helped me out," Eddie snorted. "You just wanted to see if you could make Stan lose his shit."

"I guess," Richie shrugged, suddenly subdued. "But I just.....I wanted you to win."

"How come?"

"You always look so sad when you lose," Richie looked up, a grin on his face. "Still cute, but sad."

"You helped me win....." Eddie said slowly. "Because you thought I would be sad if I didn't win a pile of old candy and shitty arcade prize toys?"

"Hey, those Scooby-Doo tattoos are awesome!"

"It's all junk," Eddie laughed.

"Yeah, but you were happy you won, admit it," Richie said, slinging his arm around Eddie's shoulder. Eddie's heart started beating faster. It had started doing that these days anytime Richie got in his personal space, which was pretty much all the time. Eddie was sure he was on the verge of a heart attack.

"I'm happy I won," Eddie said quietly.

"See? That wasn't so hard."

"Just like your dick."

Richie threw his head back and laughed, pulling Eddie into a sloppy hug. "Oh, Eds, I love it when you talk dirty to me."

"Get off!" Eddie squirmed, but he didn't put up a real fight. He liked the way Richie's arms felt around his waist. After a beat, Richie pulled back, his ever-present smile still plastered across his face.

Eddie liked Richie's smile.

"Hey."

"Yeah?"

"Next time we play Monopoly, I'll help you win."

"Oh, we're gonna make Stan have a nervous breakdown."

8. paper rings

I hate accidents

Except when we went from friends to this

Richie Tozier didn't have a filter. It's what earned him the nickname "Trashmouth" and many a black eye or busted lip. He said whatever he thought, whatever he felt, in the exact instant that it was in his head. Sure, it could be a safety hazard, but Richie kinda liked letting his emotions lead the way. If more people were like him, things would be a lot easier. No tiptoeing around certain subjects, no lying, no sick feeling in your stomach from swallowing the words you want so desperately to say.

You know, all the things Richie was doing now.

He liked Eddie. *Like* liked him. And he had no fucking clue what to do about it.

Eddie was his best friend, right? And he couldn't mess that up. What if Eddie didn't like him that way, or worse, thought he was gross? Or that there was something wrong with him? What if Eddie never wanted to see him again?

Thoughts like these were enough to keep even the notorious Trashmouth from speaking up.

"Richie?"

Dreaming, he was dreaming-

"Richie, come on."

-starry skies and wind against his face and soft brown eyes-

"Jesus fuck, Richie, get up!"

"Holy-" Richie sat straight up and slammed his head into something.

“Jesus fucking Christ!”

“You motherfucker!” Eddie hissed in pain. *Guess that’s what I just headbutted* . “Why did you do that?”

“Why were you looming over me as I slept, you fucking vampire?”

“I wasn’t *looming* over you, I - no, you know what, I’m not fucking doing this with you. Go back to sleep.”

“No, no, no,” Richie yanked Eddie back down to sit next to him. “You wake me up at-” He squinted at the glow-in-the-dark face of his watch, but his still-sleep-bleary eyes couldn’t make out the numbers. “-ass o’clock and now you’ve decided there’s no reason?”

“If you two don’t shut up,” Stan’s voice said out of nowhere, startling both boys. “I’m gonna fucking kill you. Like, for real this time.”

“I’ll help him,” Mike said groggily.

“Mutiny!” Richie whispered harshly, raising a fist. “You’ll all regret the day you were - ow, what the fuck?”

His monologue had been interrupted by at least three pillows being thrown at his head.

“Come on,” Eddie yanked on his hand, dragging him out into Ben’s hallway.

“Stop pulling me!”

“Stop being so fucking loud, you’re gonna wake everybody up!”

“That’s what I had to tell your mom last ni - ow, what the fuck was that for?”

“Stop fucking talking about my mom or I’ll hit you again, I swear.”

By this time, Eddie had towed Richie down the stairs and out Ben’s backdoor. He quickly let go of Richie’s hand once the door swung shut.

“Eddie, I swear to God, if you woke me up and brought me outside just to yell at me, I’m gonna give you a wedgie. I don’t care if it’s cliché, I’m gonna do it anyway.”

“I only yell at you when you deserve it-”

“ So not true.”

“-and that’s not why I woke you up. I....” Eddie stopped suddenly, eyes locked on Richie’s face. Richie stared right back.

“What? Do I have something on my face?”

“No, no, I - ” Eddie shook his head slightly. “Lost my train of thought.”

“You were explaining why you brought me out to Ben’s backyard in the middle of the night?”

“Oh, right!” A small smile flashed across Eddie’s face. “Look,” he pointed up. Richie tilted his head back and-

“Full moon,” they said in unison.

Richie looked back down at Eddie, a goofy smile on his face. The full moon thing had started when they were in 3rd grade and doing a kiddie astronomy unit. Both boys had gotten really into it, memorizing constellations and lunar cycle names and just generally driving Bill and Stan crazy with their obsession with the night skies.

They weren’t as hyperfixated on all that now, but they both would still call out constellations on camping trips at the Barrens or walks home from the Aladdin. They would still squint their eyes to point out planets (Richie always took a particular delight in yelling “I found Uranus!”). And they would always stare up at the full moon.

“Can’t believe you woke me up for this,” Richie grumbled, but he reached out for Eddie, draping an arm over his shoulders. “So stupid.”

“Yeah,” Eddie agreed. “Stupid.”

These were the moments that made Richie feel like maybe this was the perfect time to say something. On the other hand, this was a great moment. He had his best friend by his side and the full moon up in the sky and why should he mess with a good thing?

"It always looks the same," Richie said softly. "I don't know why I like looking at it so much. It never changes."

"I like that," Eddie shrugged. "Nice to have something constant."

"You've got me."

"The only constant you are is a constant pain in my ass."

"Are you really gonna ruin a perfect moment like this with some crude joke? You wound me, Eduardo."

"Why is this a perfect moment?" Eddie was looking up at Richie, brow furrowed and lips pressed together.

"Um," Richie panicked. It had just slipped out, like the worst kind of accident, and now he was lost for words. "What?"

"You said this was a perfect moment," Eddie said slowly. "Why is it perfect?"

"Because.....because...." *Oh, fuck it* . "Because I'm with you."

"Richie-"

"And everything's always good when I'm with you," he was rambling now. "Eds, you're my best friend and I know all the Losers are best friends, but you're my *best* best friend and I just-"

"Richie, can I-"

"-like being with you, even when we're not really doing anything! Like, right now, we're staring at the moon like fucking old people, but it's perfect because we're together and - fuck," Richie paused, trying to catch his breath. "Fuck, Eddie, I like you. A lot."

Eddie waited to make sure Richie wasn't gonna interrupt again before

opening his mouth. "Well, yeah, Richie, we're friends."

"No, that's not what I—" Richie felt like he was gonna throw up. He turned away from Eddie, trying to plaster a Trashmouth Tozier smile on his face, hoping to play it off like a joke, a bit. *No, you know what? Fuck that.*

"Eddie, I like you," Richie said again. "And not like friends. Well, I mean, yeah like friends kind of, because you're my best friend but - I like like you."

Eddie stared at him wordlessly, eyes wide with something Richie couldn't read. His hands were fidgeting at his sides and Richie knew he was wishing he had his inhaler.

"You don't have to say anything," Richie said, suddenly feeling deeply, enormously tired. "I just.....well, I thought you should know."

He turned around to head back into the house, exhaustion weighing down on his very bones. It was like all the tension of carrying his secret had been pressing down on him and now that it was gone, he was realizing how much energy it had sapped from him.

His hand was on the doorknob when Eddie finally spoke.

"You're not fucking with me." A statement, not a question.

"No, I'm not fucking with you," Richie whirled around, energy suddenly coursing through him like an electric shock. "You think I'd joke about this? Wouldn't be too fucking funny, would it?"

"Just like all your other jokes," Eddie said and there was a smile on his face. A small one, but it was enough to kick Richie's heartbeat into high gear.

"Way to kick a guy while he's down."

Eddie laughed softly. Richie needed him to say something substantive, something that was real, that he could hold on to. For once in his life, he didn't want any jokes.

"So, you really meant all of that." Eddie was looking shyly at his feet.

Richie thought his heart was going to burst out of his chest.

“Yeah,” he pushed his glasses back into place. “Yeah, I meant it all.”

Eddie looked up at him quickly, a ghost of a smile on his face. “Wow, I don’t think I’ve ever heard you be sincere before. It’s weird.”

“Shut up,” Richie snorted, taking a few hesitant steps toward Eddie.

“Rich, I....” he stopped, looking at Richie helplessly. “I don’t know-”

“It’s okay, Ed-”

“Let me fucking talk, okay?” Eddie let out a big breath. Richie mimed locking his lips and throwing away the key. Eddie rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. It made Richie feel less nervous. “I - I like you, too, okay? I have for awhile now, but you’re just so-”

“Handsome?”

“Ridiculous,” Eddie snorted. “You’re so ridiculous and all-over-the-place and, like, *handsy* with everybody, so I just thought-”

“Oh my God, you were totally jealous,” Richie was smiling so big his cheeks hurt, but he didn’t care. Eddie *liked* him. Eddie liked *him* .

“I was not, dumbass!”

“Oh, I bet it *killed* you when I sat on Mike’s lap last week.”

“I wasn’t jealous, you fucker!” Eddie swung his hand out in a familiar motion and, if Richie hadn’t caught his arm in a well-practiced move, he would’ve smacked Richie’s shoulder. “Let go!” Eddie snapped, trying to wiggle out of Richie’s grip, but he just pulled him closer until they were practically bumping chests.

“Still want me to let go?” Richie said, voice so quiet it was almost a whisper.

Eddie shook his head, eyes flicking nervously from Richie’s eyes to his mouth.

Richie swallowed hard, suddenly nervous. Should he-?

But before he could finish that thought, Eddie put his hands on either side of Richie's face, dragged him down to his level, and kissed him.

Richie closed his eyes, kissing back, while his hands settled somewhere around Eddie's waist. It was happening, it was finally happening and it was real, it was - Richie pulled back suddenly.

"What?" Eddie looked up at him, slightly dazed. "What is it?" Richie reached out and pinched him. "Ow! What the fuck was that for?"

"Just trying to make sure I'm not dreaming."

"You're supposed to pinch yourself, you moron!" Eddie reached out and smacked Richie before he could stop him again. He started laughing, even though his arm smarted from where Eddie hit him.

"What's so funny?" Eddie said, starting to laugh himself.

"I just kissed my crush," Richie said between giggles. "And instead of, like, upgrading it to a steamy make-out sesh, we stopped to hit each other like fucking third graders"

"You started it!"

"I know I did," Richie said fondly. "Now, come here."

And as they kissed again, Eddie's hands hesitantly reaching up to tangle in Richie's hair, Richie thought, *Best fucking full moon ever.*

9. cornelia street

And I hope I never lose you

Hope it never ends

“Come over tonight.”

“Calc homework.”

“That was your excuse last night.”

“Well, they keep assigning me homework, you see, and-”

“Shut up, Eds,” Richie shook his head, a smile on his face. They were sitting on the back steps of the school, waiting for the rest of the Losers to show up. They had all somehow ended up with the same free period this year so, unless there was an emergency, they all met up there (Bev and Richie liked it because they could smoke without worrying that a teacher would show up and start handing out detentions).

“If I come over tonight, will you promise to help me with the Spanish presentation next week?” Eddie raised an eyebrow.

“I love it when you drive a hard bargain, babe,” Richie laughed, leaning down to press a quick kiss on his lips.

That was all they were brave enough to try at school, even though there was no one around now. It was just easier to leave some things private.

Eddie leaned his head on Richie’s shoulder, hands fiddling with the zipper on his jacket. He and Richie had been together for the last few weeks, finding time between school and movie nights and family dinners to just.....be together. Richie laying his head on Eddie’s stomach as he read comic books out loud. Eddie shyly twining their fingers together in the dark of the movie theater. And, Eddie’s favorite, all the kissing. Richie’s soft, slow goodnight kisses, his

chaste smacks on the cheek, his hot and heavy open mouth kisses when they were alone at night.

It was all perfect, even with the sneaking around and the constant fear that someone, anyone, would find out and ruin everything. Well, anyone besides the Losers, that is. Eddie and Richie hadn't even needed to tell them. The morning after the kiss, when all of them were sitting in Ben's kitchen eating waffles and cereal, Bev had looked at both boys, put her fork down and said, "Oh my God, you guys finally kissed."

"What?" Eddie had spluttered, cheeks already getting red.

"Sweet!" Bill pumped his fist into the air. "St-stan, you owe m-m-me t-ten bucks."

"You placed *bets* ?" Eddie could hear his voice sharpening into a shriek.

"Don't you guys have any hobbies?" Richie rolled his eyes, still eating his breakfast.

"Yeah, but watching you two be totally oblivious is way more fun than birdwatching with Stan," Mike snorted. Stan punched his shoulder lightly, before digging through his pockets and handing a crumpled ten dollar bill to Bill.

And that had been the end of it. Oh, sure, there was teasing and kissing noises and stupid nicknames, but as much as he professed to hate it, it made Eddie feel happy. His friends accepted, and even encouraged, this relationship. No judgement, no hate. It helped, especially when he remembered how upset his mom would be if she found out.

"Eddie and Richie sitting in a tree," a sing-songy voice interrupted Eddie's thoughts. "K-I-S-S-I-"

"Shut up, Bev," both boys chorused, not even looking up to watch her come down the stairs. She was trailed by Ben and Stan. They all sat down on the stairs, Bev lighting a cigarette and taking a deep pull, before exhaling and saying, "Ah, but it's so fun to make fun of you

guys.”

“She’s right,” Stan dropped his chin into his hand, elbows digging into his knees. “I mean, Rich, you were low-hanging fruit before-”

“More like *have* some low-hanging fruit, am I right?”

“-but being all lovey-dovey has made it so much easier,” Stan finished, as if he hadn’t even heard Richie’s very poor balls joke. At least, Eddie assumed it was a joke about his balls. Sometimes, Richie said things that, to him, made perfect sense. For everyone else, it was like trying to decipher a sentence in a foreign language.

“You’re all just jealous that Eddie and I are young, beautiful, and going at it like rabbits-”

“Beep-beep, Rich!”

“-while you’re all sitting at home alone, wishing you were us.” Richie finished, a cheesy smile lighting up his face.

“The day I wish I was you, please send me to the psych ward,” Stan snorted.

Richie dug through his pocket to find a pencil, which he promptly threw at Stan.

“Look, Bill,” Mike’s voice rang out over the din. “Ten minutes without us and they’re already at each other’s throats.”

“C-can’t live without us,” Bill shook his head, plopping down next to Ben, who snorted.

“It’s just Stan and Richie, as always,” he rolled his eyes, but there was a good-natured smile on his face that undercut it.

“Richie always starts it!”

“I do not!”

“Rich, he has a point-”

"If you're not gonna back me up, then just stay out of it, Bev."

"Fuck off."

As Eddie watched his friends laugh and shout and shove each other, Mike passing around a pack of gum, Ben helping Bill with the math homework, he felt a sudden wave of sadness pass over him. He couldn't explain it, but it was so sudden and strong it almost took his breath away. He must have twitched or something because Richie looked over at him.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," Eddie shook his head slightly, as if to shake away the bad feeling. "Yeah, just.....got a weird feeling."

"Like a regular weird feeling, or a killer clown weird feeling?" Richie was smiling, but it didn't reach his eyes, which is how Eddie could tell he was only half-kidding.

"Regular weird," he assured him, slipping his hand into Richie's.

"Earth to the love birds," Bev called out. "You can whisper sweet nothings into each other's ears later, okay?"

"Sweet nothings," Richie snorted. "More like me telling Eddie all the things I wanna do-"

"Beep fucking beep," Eddie groaned, burying his face in his hands. God, of all the people in the world, why Richie? Why did he have to fall for this complete disaster of a person, a guy with no filter and no concept of personal space?

But then Richie pulled him closer into his side and Eddie felt warm and safe and *oh yeah, that's why*.

He had almost forgotten about the wave of sadness by the time he and Richie walked home from school. He was rambling about this girl who sat in front of him in English, Julie Leeds, who was always tossing her hair and it always landed on his desk and paper and he hated it and was considering asking to switch seats and-

“What was the weird feeling?”

Eddie looked up sharply. Richie was still looking straight ahead, arms swinging at his sides. *God, he's so stupidly tall .*

“Weird feeling?” Eddie decided to play dumb.

“Don't play dumb, Eds.” Okay, so playing dumb wasn't gonna work.

“It was just.....” Eddie trailed off. “I don't know, I was just looking at you and our friends and we're all so happy, you know?”

“Yeah, 'cause we're not being actively hunted by zombie Bozo anymore.”

Eddie snickered, nudging Richie's shoulder with his own.

“So,” Richie continued. “You got a weird feeling because we're happy?”

“Yeah,” Eddie shrugged. “Because I'm just.....well, it can't last, right? The other shoe is gonna drop and everything's gonna go to shit again.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Richie stopped, grabbing Eddie's arm to stop him. “Hold up, shortstack.”

“Don't fucking call me that.”

“What makes you think things can't go on like this forever?” Richie smiled, his mouth contorting into a high-watt beam that made him look like a sleazy gameshow host.

Eddie looked at him, the unspoken “duh!” hanging in the air. “Um.....because this is Derry?”

“Yeah, but Penny Fuckhead is gone,” Richie gestured vaguely around, like he was trying to show Eddie “See? No clown.”

“Yeah, but-”

“No buts,” Richie reached out and took his hand. “We're allowed to

be happy, you know.”

Eddie looked at their hands, fingers intertwined. They were right together. They fit. He liked that, he liked that *so much* .

“I don’t wanna lose you,” he said quietly, so quietly he wasn’t even sure Richie could hear him. He squeezed his hand, as if to reassure himself that they were still there, together.

“Hey,” Richie said softly. “Look at me.”

Eddie raised his head to meet Richie’s eyes and *God* , he had pretty eyes. Kinda green and magnified by his glasses and looking at him like he was special, like he was wonderful, like he was all there was. It was sort of weird to see Richie without a weird expression distorting his features, or a twinkle in his eye from a joke he was about to tell, but sincere Richie was nice, too.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he smiled. “Remember? I’m like an STD-

“Hard to get rid of, I know,” Eddie finished the joke, one of Richie’s personal favorites.

“I’m happy, and you’re happy,” Richie was pulling him closer with every word. “And the Losers are happy, and your mom is *definitely* happy, seeing as how I hit her room on my way out of yours-”

“Shut *up* !”

“-and nothing is ending,” Richie finished, a satisfied smile on his face. “Life is good, okay? Let yourself enjoy this.”

“Enjoy wha-”

But Richie’s mouth was already on his, kissing him softly and sweetly and Eddie was happy, yeah, but that same feeling of sadness was washing over him again and he couldn’t help but think that none of this could last for too much longer.

10. death by a thousand cuts

Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts

It wasn't supposed to end like this, you know? It wasn't supposed to end at all but, if it *had* to, Richie had thought there would be monsters and explosions and wailing and maybe he'd have a sword or something.

Instead, it was a moving van and cardboard boxes and Eddie's arms wrapped around him so tightly he can barely breathe and.....that's it.

No explosions. No monsters. No swords.

Just Eddie.

"This sucks."

"Way to state the obvious, idiot."

Richie chuckles, despite himself.

"Ah, Eds," he sighed. "Never miss a chance to be a little shit, huh?"

"It makes this whole thing feel more normal," Eddie took his face out of Richie's chest, where it had been buried for the last five minutes.

"Nothing's normal with me around, remember?"

"Okay, so normal for us."

"I don't want you to go," Richie said suddenly. He had been doing that ever since Eddie had broken the news that he and his mom would be moving to Portland at the end of July, like if he caught Eddie by surprise, he would agree to stay and nothing would change.

"You think I want to?" Eddie rolled his eyes, turning away from Richie to fidget with the tape on top of a box that had "EDDIE

SHOES” scrawled across the side.

They’d been having this conversation for weeks; sometimes Eddie would cry, sometimes Richie would yell, sometimes they’d both just start laughing for no reason at all. Richie swore they were both going crazy, but maybe it was just knowing that the one thing that meant the most was slipping out of your hands and there was nothing you could do about it.

“It’s not fair-” Richie started, but then abruptly stopped. He had been saying these lines over and over for the past few months and nothing had changed. Why waste the last day on words that had already been said a hundred times?

“I’ll call you every day,” he said instead. “And write letters. Send carrier pigeons. Hell, I’m sure Ben can help me figure out how to make some smoke signals.”

“Glad I’ll have that to look forward to,” Eddie rolled his eyes, a smile on his face. It hurt, pretending that everything was normal and fine, but it hurt more to accept that this was happening. Richie was glad Eddie was playing along.

“Eddie-Bear!” A shrill voice called out. “Your little friends are here!”

“Okay, Ma!”

“Didn’t hear the door open,” Richie murmured as they started to make their way downstairs. “Your mom still refusing to let them in the house?”

“You know how she feels about you guys,” Eddie sighed. “The only reason you got in was because you were ‘helping me pack.’”

They opened the front door to see the rest of the Losers standing in the yard, bikes piled haphazardly around them.

“Hey, Eddie,” Stan said cheerfully. “Have I mentioned lately that I hate your mom?”

Everyone cracked up at that, but it was the same desperate laughter that Richie hated so much, the laughter that said “I am losing

something and there's nothing I can do about it, so I guess I'll laugh because crying would hurt too goddamn much."

Richie flopped down on the grass, the rest of them following suit. They watched the movers in silence for a few minutes before Mike spoke up.

"I'm gonna miss you, Eddie," he said, in that careful, measured way he had. "I'm gonna miss you a lot."

"M-me, too," Bill put a hand on Eddie's shoulder. "I d-d-don't know w-what I'll do without y-you."

"Who's gonna patch me up the next time Bowers decides to practice writing his name on my stomach?" Ben was smiling, but it didn't reach his eyes.

"Don't worry, Haystack, Dr. K here has given me a crash course in patching up the helpless," Richie grinned.

"Don't let him near you, Ben," Stan spoke up. "There's bacteria living on his hands that scientists haven't even discovered yet."

And then they were all laughing again and if Richie closed his eyes and cleared his mind, he could pretend that this was any other day. He and his friends were just hanging out and having fun and nothing ever had to change.

Eventually, though, he had to open his eyes and see Sonia Kaspbrak calling Eddie to come get in the car. Had to see his friends all sober up, see the tears glistening in Ben's eyes, see the determined set of Bill's mouth. Had to see Eddie grab his hand and drag him into the empty house, a desperate look on his face as he kissed him one last time (*no, this can't be the last time, I won't let it be the last time*).

Had to see the car and the moving truck drive away, Eddie's face pressed up against the glass as he waved furiously at them until he was out of sight.

The Losers all stood there silently, waiting for Eddie to pop out of the bushes and say, "Just kidding! You should see you guys' faces!"

Spoiler alert: he didn't.

Richie closed his eyes again, trying to center himself as the world turned and churned underneath his feet. He jumped slightly when he felt arms wrap around his middle, but the whiff of faint cigarette smoke let him know that it was just Bev.

"It's gonna be okay, Rich," Stan said quietly.

"Yeah," Richie tried to laugh, but his voice was thick and he could feel his shoulders starting to shake. He tried to soldier through it, though. "Yeah, I know, Stanley. But not right now."

And that's what it all came down to, didn't it? Because things would eventually be okay, but not now. Not when Eddie hadn't even crossed the county line yet, not when Richie could still smell the lingering scent of hand sanitizer, not when there was still a chance he might come back.

"L-let's g-g-go," Bill said. Richie finally opened his eyes to see his friends standing around him, silent support hanging heavy in the air.

"Ah, but where, Big Bill?" Richie sniffed, one of those horrible sniffs that is full of snot and unshed tears. He laughed, and this time there was actually something real in it. "Where do we go to pour one out for the late, great Edward K?"

"My house," Stan said decisively. "There's an *Unsolved Mysteries* marathon on for the next 8 hours and I do believe it's calling our names."

"You ready, Rich?" Bev removed her arms from around Richie's waist and stood back to study him carefully.

"As I'll ever be."

Which is to say, not ready at all. But he had to start living life without Eddie at some point, so why not start now? Denial or acceptance, it all still hurt the same.

11. london boy

like a child when our eyes meet

27 years. 27 years older and somehow, Eddie felt exactly like the scrawny, freckled kid he was the summer of '89.

He crashed his car when Mike called. Never even been in a fender-bender in his life and suddenly he's having his own demolition derby in the middle of Manhattan.

He left for Maine quickly, without any of the hemming and hawing he usually did before any sort of event. When you suddenly remember that you don't remember anything at all, you don't have a lot of time to pore over Yelp reviews of local hotels.

Now he's standing in a Chinese restaurant that wasn't there when they were kids, trying to remember how he became friends with the famous horror author William Denbrough, when the bang of a gong interrupts them and he looks up and - Richie.

Richie, grinning sheepishly as the gong finishes ringing out. Richie, who still has the thick frames and messy hair of childhood. Richie, who turns to look at him with the same hazel eyes and - Eddie feels like he's been kicked in the chest.

Because he's old as fuck now, but he looks in Richie's eyes and he's a kid again. And not in a fun way, either. In a "I'm-panicking-like-I'm-in-the-throes-of-puberty-everything-feels-weird" sort of way.

The memories don't all come back right away. It starts as he and Richie bicker over MSG and WebMD and things start to trickle back in; saving seats and Texas Hold 'Em and Sour Patch Kids and full moons. But it all comes without context and shuffled out of order, so Eddie's not sure if Richie is really good at cards, if they actually watched old black and white movies, if Ben used to tutor them both in science. Or did *he* tutor Ben and Richie? Did they play poker or was it actually Monopoly? He feels like he's trying to put together a

puzzle, but nothing matches and he can't find the corner pieces.

Of course, the cursed fortune cookies and demonic maggot baby things sort of slam the brakes on the whole "Eddie Kaspbrak, this is your life!" montage he was trying to make sense of. He and Richie are the only ones who are adamant that they leave town and that feeling of being on Richie's side, that they're a team.....it feels familiar and comfortable in a way that Eddie isn't sure how to describe.

It doesn't fully hit him until he hears Richie yell "Eduardo, *á ndale* , let's go!" and - oh. *I kissed him. In Ben's backyard. I woke him up in the middle of the night and he told me he liked me and I -*

"Coming!" Eddie chokes out.

He takes a deep breath, lets it out. Tries to regulate his heartbeat. Tries to sort through the memories that are swirling around his head. *We dated, didn't we? I remember kissing at the movie theater; we'd sit in the back row so no one could see. But for how long? Before or after It?* Eddie's mind races as he tries to sort everything out.

Does Richie remember?

Because that's really the only thing that matters, right? Forget Pennywise the dancing bitch, forget the friends he didn't know he had; did Richie remember everything? Or was it all bits and pieces that felt like they'd been put in a blender?

He walks downstairs carefully, not as desperate to leave as he had been before. He might be scared of the demonic alien clown, but he also really wants answers for the magic amnesia that made him forget he used to *like* like Richie Tozier.

"Eddie?" Fingers snap in front of his face, breaking him out of his thoughts.

"Huh? What?" he splutters.

"Did you just seriously zone out during our 'how do we defeat the demon clown of our youth' discussion?" Bev raises an eyebrow.

"No!" Eddie scrambles for an explanation. "I was just - uh, thinking about Stan." He winces. Using your dead friend as an excuse for not paying attention during Mike's "how to win friends and murder monsters" book report presentation definitely earns you some time in hell.

No one says anything, but Ben gently puts a hand on his shoulder, and it feels so familiar that it makes Eddie want to jump out of his skin. He was 40 years old and had almost forgotten what it felt like to have friends outside of the people you see at work, but he's remembering now and the feeling of relief is so sharp, it almost hurts.

"Th-that's w-w-why we n-need to d-d-do this," Bill says grimly.

"For Stanley," Mike agrees. He starts talking again, about a ritual and magic and how there's power in all of them, in all of them *together* and Eddie feels like screaming.

When they were kids, all it took to kill It was an old baseball bat and the righteous, unbridled anger that comes from being 13 and pissed off. They were older now, and Eddie is struck by the sudden knowledge that some things seem infinitely easier to do when you're young. Try to do the same thing as an adult and it's impossible.

Kissing Richie wasn't easy, not at first, but Eddie compares the way he felt then to the way he feels now, and he doesn't know how he ever had the balls to do it. Kissing Richie now feels about as easy as finally killing that stupid fucking clown.

The rest of the Losers decide to break for the night, Mike making them all swear that they'll stick around. Eddie does so mechanically before heading upstairs. He needs to figure out a way to process that he lost a large chunk of his life and that chunk included friends and a killer clown and kissing a boy with scabby knees and a sly grin.

"Hey, Eds?"

Eddie freezes, hand gripping the bannister tightly. He turns around to see Richie standing a couple stairs below him.

“Yeah?”

“You okay?”

Eddie feels like he's going to throw up because he feels 40 and 13 all at the same time, just from looking at Richie's face, at the scar on his chin from when he fell off his bike, at the same wild black hair, at the mouth that only stopped talking when Eddie was pressing a kiss to it and -

“Eddie, seriously, man,” Richie was coming up the stairs now. “Are you alright? I mean, I know that's a relative question, considering what Mike's got on the agenda for tomorrow, but I don't remember you completely checking out like this when we were kids.”

“This is all just so.....” Eddie trails off.

“Yeah, I know,” Richie laughs humorlessly, the beginnings of a sarcastic grin on his face. “I'm getting vertigo from all the repressed memories I'm currently being bombarded with.”

“Same,” Eddie laughs, too. It's a reflex when he's around Richie, he remembers that now, remembers laughing, even when he tried not to, at Richie's jokes and how happy Richie always looked when he did.

“Like, how am I just now remembering that time we all went to the mall and that guy had a tray of soap samples but Stan told me it was candy so I ended up eating it?”

“You probably would've eaten it even if you knew it was soap.”

“Yeah, but I would've liked the option of knowing it was soap before I put it in my mouth.”

“They don't call you Trashmouth for nothing.”

“Isn't it weird that that's one of the few things that stuck?” Richie says soberly, the grin starting to slide off his face. “The one thing I remember from adolescence and it's a fucking shitty nickname.”

“At least you got something,” Eddie sighs, sitting down heavily on the

stairs. Richie joins him. "All I used to be able to remember was ER visits."

"Yeah, I do recall you spending quite a bit of time there."

"Fuck off."

"God, this is weird," Richie snorts.

"What?"

"27 years later and you're still a little shit and I'm still a dick with a motormouth and.....I don't know, I just thought - thought I'd grown past this or something."

"It's all this," Eddie gestures vaguely at the room around them. "Being here. I feel it, too. Like I'm a kid again."

"Sucks major balls."

"Yep."

Eddie breathes out heavily, dropping his chin in his hands, elbows digging into his knees. A position leftover from childhood. He thinks about straightening up, but decides to embrace it, slouching further down. He wonders if Richie remembers and just isn't saying anything, but quickly brushes that thought away. Richie wouldn't do that. *I guess he doesn't remember yet. Maybe he never will. God, I hope that doesn't happen.*

"How are we gonna do this, Eds?" Richie turns to look at him. "How are we gonna do this again? We're not kids anymore, we don't have that - that magic ass-kicking ability we used to. Instead, I've got bad knees and heartburn."

Eddie snorts. Typical Richie; saying something serious, then immediately undercutting it with a joke.

"Let's hope Mike's been prepping for battle since '89."

"He probably has," Richie rolled his eyes. "Fucking nerd."

“This is all feels like a dream,” Eddie says quietly. “A really bad one. Or maybe one I’ve had before.”

Richie reaches out his hand and, before Eddie can realize what he’s doing, pinches Eddie’s hand. Hard.

“Ow! What the fuck was that for?”

“Trying to make sure we’re not dreaming,” Richie says with a grin on his face, but as he reaches the end of the sentence, his face starts to go slack.

“You’re supposed to pinch yourself, you moron!” Eddie snapped, smacking Richie’s arm. The words felt familiar in his mouth, almost like he’d said them before. Richie doesn’t say anything; just stares at Eddie like he’s seen a ghost. “What? What the fuck is it?”

“Holy shit,” he says, eyes wide. “Holy shit, Eds, we used to make out.”

Okay, so I guess he remembers.

12. soon you'll get better

i didn't tell you i was scared

At 3:46 am, Richie Tozier found himself yakking up shitty Chinese food in a shitty hotel in his shitty hometown.

"Typical," he mutters to himself after he was sure the worst of it was over.

Richie had always been a vomiter, even when he was a kid. Whenever he got excited or scared or nervous, well, cue the barf.

So, after a night of remembering a childhood you forgot that you forgot and promising to stick around and murder a space clown, it was understandable that he'd be a little queasy. Add in the sudden revelation that you and your best friend were each other's first kiss, and presto! Time to hurl.

He slumps against the edge of the bathtub, slowly rubbing his eyes.

He and Eddie had agreed not to talk about it. At least, not now, not when they barely remembered the whole story, not when they were scheduled to duke it out with Pennywise in a few short hours. There was too much going on to have the "hey, just remembered you were my gay awakening!" conversation right now.

Richie was bi and had known that for most of his life, so it wasn't like him and Eddie was some earth-shattering thing. It's nice to have some context for how it all began, though. He suddenly remembers: *Bev, cigarette smoke, "you're an equal opportunist," laughing so hard I couldn't stand up* . Sucks that he didn't have that memory before.

Sucks that he didn't have a lot of memories before.

They're starting to come back faster now, the important ones. Eddie told him he'd remembered them being together a few hours earlier (*explains the weird mental fog he was in while we discussed clown murder*), but it didn't hit Richie until that conversation, the one that was

weirdly identical to the one they'd had right after they kissed for the first time.

Must be some of Mike's magic at work.

It's sort of like watching old home movies, except they're jerky and disjointed and sometimes they cut before you can even figure out what's happening. He remembers a day when Eddie got him an ice cream cone, just him, no one else, and how it made his heart beat faster. He remembers laying side by side on his bed, reading comics and kissing Eddie to make him blush. He remembers - he remembers enough. Enough to know that Eddie is important, has always been important.

It's funny because before all this, before Richie fully remembered who these people were and what they meant to him, he was adamant that he was going back to LA. No field trips through the Derry sewers, no siree! Why should he care if the magic didn't work without all of them together?

Now that he remembers, though, now that he knows them all and loves them all, he knows he has to stay and see this through. And it's going to be hard because he has something to lose, but maybe it'll be easier because he has something to hold onto.

That's why it worked the first time, he thinks. *Because we loved each other so fucking much that we could wrap our arms around that love and hold on when the going got tough and it always saw us through.*

He goes to sleep after that. He can only philosophize on a scummy bathroom floor for so long.

The next morning, Mike drags them all out to the Barrens and Richie laughs so hard he thinks he pees a little when Ben falls through the roof of their old clubhouse. Mike explains the tokens and tells them to split up.

Richie just so happens to split up with Eddie.

"So," he starts, shortening his stride to match Eddie's as they make their way out of the woods. "I know we said we weren't gonna talk

about it, but -"

"So then don't," Eddie tries to snap, but there's no bite to it. O h , Richie thinks stupidly. *He's scared* .

"Hey, Eds -"

"Don't call me that, Jesus Christ, how many times do we have to fucking do thi-"

"Eddie, shut up for just, like, a fucking second, okay?" Richie grabs his arm, stopping him before he walked into a tree. Eddie folds his arms, a scowl on his face, but he doesn't say anything. Richie takes this as encouragement to proceed.

"It's gonna be okay," he hears himself saying, and his brain cannot fucking *believe* what his mouth is doing. "Mike's been studying this shit like you've been studying articles on WebMD. He knows what he's doing. We're gonna win."

"You don't know that," Eddie presses his lips together. "You're just - just placating me, trying to get me to calm down, just like when we were kids and you thought I was being irrational, even when I was being *completely* rational and -"

"It's gonna be okay," Richie repeats, gently grabbing onto Eddie's flailing hands. Eddie stops, eyes drawn to their linked hands. He looks up at Richie and his eyes, God, his eyes are just the way they were at 13, all deep brown and big and waiting for Richie to tell him a joke, a story, anything to convince him that everything was fine.

"You're not scared?"

"Nah," Richie shrugs, then squeezes Eddie's hands lightly. He mentally pats himself on the back for sounding so goddamn light and breezy. *And my agent said I couldn't act for shit. Ha !* "Look, if things go south, I'll just grab a baseball bat and go all Barry Bonds on that motherfucker."

"Just like last time," Eddie chuckles, a small smile on his face. *This is what you have to lose* , Richie thinks. *This is what you have to hold onto* .

“Just like last time,” Richie repeats before dropping Eddie’s hands. “Now, let’s bounce. Got me some tokens to find.”

“Mike said we have to do it on our own!”

“So, what, you’re not gonna give me a ride into town? You want us to take two cars? Do you even *care* about the holes in the ozone layer?”

Eddie smacks his shoulder, the same way he always did. Richie smiles. “I missed that.”

“What, me physically abusing you?”

“Yeah, that, and just.....” Richie trails off. “You, I guess. I missed you.”

Eddie just nods. “I missed you, too. Even when I didn’t know that I did.”

“God, you’re such a sap.”

“Fuck you, dude.”

Richie slings an arm around Eddie’s shoulder as they start walking up the path, something he can now remember he did a hundred times before. *It’s nice to know the beginning* , he thinks almost nonsensically. *Now the rest of the story makes sense* .

13. false god

remember how i said i'd die for you?

“Does it hurt?”

Eddie turns to stare fully at Richie, wishing that he could shoot lasers out of his eyes. He forgot how easy Richie made it to want to throttle him.

“Yes,” he says slowly, his hand applying careful pressure to his still-bleeding cheek. “Yes, the gaping knife wound in the side of my face hurts. Who would’ve thought?”

“Geez, I was just asking,” Richie grumbles, but there’s real worry in his eyes, Eddie can see it.

They’d all gotten back to the hotel at different times, each fairly rattled by the things they’d seen, the things they’d remembered. Eddie had found himself absentmindedly wondering if things could get worse.

He quickly found out that yeah, things could get a lot fucking worse. Fucking Bowers in his bathroom. Somehow, he still had the same switchblade, same haircut, same unhinged smile. He put a fucking hole in Eddie’s face, Eddie accidentally stabbed him and, before he could get someone else to finish him off, Bowers disappeared.

Bev had patched him up as best she could, while Richie tried to convince them all to take him to the hospital, but Eddie had put his foot down: they were gonna finish this tonight. No putting it off to go sit in a waiting room somewhere. He’d done enough of that as a kid. So, he and Richie sat in the lobby of the hotel, waiting for Mike and Bill to show up so they could finally do this fucking thing.

“Do you think you could fit, like, a spoon through the hole? Because I think we could really freak some people out at that IHOP outside of town.”

"If that fucking clown doesn't end up eating us, I swear to God, I'm gonna kill you."

"I think maybe you were more fun as a kid."

"We were all more fun as kids."

"So not true," Richie says, sounding hurt. "Last night was more fun than any fucking movie night we had as kids. You know, before everything went to shit."

"I think you're getting 'fun' and 'drunk' confused," Eddie rolls his eyes.

"Aren't they the same thing?" The grin on Richie's face is the same one from childhood, the same one that used to drive Eddie insane, the same one that Eddie used to press his own lips against.

It's strange, this feeling of knowing something you once forgot. Eddie feels like he has to hold on tightly to every memory that resurfaces, like it could all be ripped away again. *Not again*, he thinks grimly. *I'm not letting go this time.*

"Eds?"

"Huh?"

"I know we said we weren't gonna talk about," Richie pauses, waving his hands around in the air. "All of this, not until it was over. But.....uh, but we don't know what's gonna happen down there-"

"It's gonna be okay," Eddie parroted Richie's earlier words back at him. "That's what you said, right?"

"I say a lot of things, Eds," Richie sighed, pushing his hands up under his glasses to rub his eyes tiredly.

"So, what, you think we're fucked?" Eddie can hear his voice getting a little higher, a little more childish. Fuck this place for trying to turn him back into a helpless kid. "All that stuff earlier, you were just bullshitting me?"

“I mean, to an extent, yeah-”

“Fuck you.”

“-but I just.....I don’t know. Sometimes, I look at all of us together and I think we just might be stronger than anything Pennywise can throw at us,” he bites his lip. “But then I worry that maybe we aren’t magic anymore. Maybe it’s gonna take more than a baseball bat and your feral screams to end this motherfucker.”

“I’m not - I wasn’t *feral*,” Eddie scrunches up his nose.

“You were always, like, a heartbeat away from just fucking screaming your head off,” Richie chuckles. “I don’t understand how you haven’t had a heart attack or something already.”

“Balanced diet.”

“That must be it.”

They lapse into silence, neither sure how to address the other shit Richie said. Eddie stares at the floor. He’d never considered the fact that maybe they didn’t have what they did 27 years ago. Sure, there were still bonds between them, but were they as strong as they once were?

Eddie remembers a time when he would’ve died for Bill, for Stan, for Richie, for all of them. The question now was: would he still?

Abso-fucking-lutely.

“Hey,” Eddie says quietly, waiting until Richie meets his eyes before continuing. “We’re gonna win. Just like we did before. Whatever it takes.”

“And what does that mean?”

“To stop It-”

To save you.

“-I’ll do whatever it takes.”

"No, not 'whatever it takes,'" Richie springs up from his chair, a wild look in his eyes. "I know what that means! Don't fucking say that, don't - don't fucking tell me you're gonna fucking sacrifice yourself for the greater good or some shit, say fucking anything, tell me you'll feed me to It with a nice lemon garnish, but - but don't fucking say that."

"Richie-"

"I thought maybe it would be easier," he says, almost like he's talking to himself. "Haven't seen you fuckers in almost 30 years, so why should I feel all 'Band of Brothers,' 'Saving Private Ryan' about it-"

Talking about fucking WWII movies, yeah, we're definitely fucking old now.

"-but it's worse!" Richie looks at him, eyes wide. "It's worse because - because now I know what it's like to lose you. Remember when you moved away?"

"Richie-"

"Dude, fuck your mom," Richie snorts. "I don't even have a joke for that, that's how serious I am about how much your mom fucking sucks. Sucked? Is she still alive?"

"Jesus Christ," Eddie groaned, dropping his head into his hands.

"When you left," Richie's voice cracks and Eddie looks up sharply. "When you left, I was fucking devastated. I remember it now and - and I'm almost kind of glad I forgot for all this time because Jesus fucking Christ, that hurt. Hurt like nothing I'd ever felt before. I don't know if- I can't, I can't do it again, Eds, I can't lose it all again, ple-"

"How do you think I felt?" Eddie snapped. "At least you had everyone else! I was *alone* in *fucking* Portland with my *fucking* mother! You think you were devastated? You think you lost big? Well, I fucking lost first, so fuck you."

"Eddie-"

"How do you think it felt to be fucking 15 and suddenly realize you

can't remember who you went to the fair with last summer? Who sat behind you in English class and passed notes with you? Who held your hand at the movies and then kissed you on the walk home? I don't ever wanna fucking feel like that again, so yeah, I'm gonna do whatever it takes to make sure I don't."

Eddie feels like he might throw up, that's how fucking angry and helpless and sad he feels right now. Richie is staring at him, mouth slightly open, a horrified look in his eyes.

"So don't fucking act like you're the only one who has something to lose," Eddie finishes, before getting up and starting to walk out of the room.

"Eddie, wait."

He turns to look at Richie, who looks paler than normal, but somehow exactly like they did when they were kids. Wide mouth, messy hair, crooked nose. Eyes that showed every emotion that flashed through his mind.

Eddie wonders when the exact day was that he forgot he loved him. He wonders if it hurt. *Of course it hurt* , he answers himself immediately. *It hurt, but you just didn't know why.*

He wonders if he still - no. No, that's over. It has to be.

"Don't do anything stupid," Richie finally says. "Don't - don't be a hero, okay? If it starts looking dicey and you gotta make a final call-"

"Shut up, *please* , just shut up," Eddie raises a hand, that same sick feeling rising up in his stomach. "Don't *ever* finish that thought."

"How about we make a deal?" Richie has the beginnings of a smile on his face. "Neither of us plays the hero. We go down there, do the bare minimum, and we let Big Bill be the hero. He loves that shit."

"Always has," Eddie agrees, chuckling despite himself. Richie had always been good at that, at talking him down, at diffusing the tension.

"So, no hero shit?" Richie says hopefully.

“No hero shit,” Eddie agrees. He looks down at his feet. Looks back up again. Sighs. “My face is still bleeding.”

“Yeah, I wasn’t sure if it would be polite to mention that.”

“Oh, because you’ve always been a paragon of etiquette.”

“Hey, a lot can change in 27 years!”

“Not that much.”

“Want me to help you temporarily stop up the glory hole in your face? Can’t give that clown any ideas now.”

“I changed my mind, I actually do want you to sacrifice yourself for me once we get down there.”

14. you need to calm down

Notes for the Chapter:

cannot believe the most dramatic and emotional scene of the story fell on the You Need To Calm Down chapter.....i mean, i know i'm the author and could have easily planned around this but wow.....literally unbelievable

you are somebody that we don't know

Eddie, you promised.

It's childish, but it's all Richie can think. *Eddie, you promised, we both did, we were gonna let Bill swoop in and save the day, it wasn't gonna be us, Eddie, we had a deal.*

It happens so quickly, Richie is still trying to process all of it: caught in the deadlights, blinding pain, suddenly dropping to earth, Eddie leaning over him, saying "I did it, Rich, I killed It" before getting impaled on a fucking spider leg (*when did It even get those*) and spitting blood all over Richie.

"Richie?" He sounds so scared, it breaks Richie's heart.

"Eddie? Eddie!"

And it hurts, it hurts so much that it's almost numb, but Richie told Eddie they were gonna be fine, and so they will be fine. That's how it works, right? So, he drags Eddie off to the side of the cave and balls up his jacket, pressing hard on the hole in Eddie's chest.

"You're gonna be okay, you're gonna be okay, this is nothing, Eds, you're gonna be fine-"

But he's not. He dies. And as Richie is being dragged from the house on Neibolt Street, screaming and crying and trying to go back in and get him, he thinks again, *Eddie, you promised.*

He watches the house crumble and he can feel Ben and Mike holding on to him with all their might and he-

He feels his body slam into something hard. He groans, slowly opens his eyes, and - the cave. He's back in the cave. The deadlights. The fucking deadlights.

"I did it, Rich!" And there Eddie is, smiling, breathless. "I kill-"

Richie grabs Eddie, presses him to his chest, and rolls them both about 5 feet over. He doesn't see it, but he can hear the spider leg slam into the spot where they had just been with all the force of an RPG, and that's enough for him. He scrambles to his feet, dragging Eddie along.

"Come on, come on, come on!" He sounds frantic, because he is frantic, for God's sake, he just thwarted some cosmic being and he intends on doing it again!

"What the fuck do we do?" Eddie yells back. They finally duck into a gap in the cave wall, trying to catch their breath.

"Fucking Mike and his fucking ritual," Richie swears. He thinks he can still taste Eddie's blood in his mouth. *Not real, not real, not real.* "And what the fuck, dude, I thought I told you not to play the fucking hero, we had a *deal* -"

"You were levitating 15 feet in the air, all, like, zombified and shit! What the fuck was I *supposed* to do, leave you like that?"

"Yes!" Richie is exasperated, even though he knows now is not exactly the time to have this conversation. "I fucking *told* you, if you had to make a call, save yourself."

"And you think me having to watch you die wouldn't be worse? Fuck you, like, so much, dude, fuck you so much."

Richie opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. Sometimes he forgets how fierce Eddie is, how he'd do anything for the people he loved.

He loves me .

The thought pops into his head, but he pushes it away as quickly as it appears. Now was not the time to start wondering if you ever truly got over your middle school sweetheart.

“Richie, Eddie, where are you guys?” *Bill’s not stuttering* , Richie thinks. *He must be really fucking scared* .

“We’re okay,” he yells back. “I mean, relatively.”

Eddie is staring off into space, brow furrowed in concentration. “Before.....with the leper.....I made him small.”

“Okay?”

“If we’re gonna get out of here,” Eddie squares his shoulders determinedly. “We’ve gotta make It small.”

And then he runs out of their safe spot, screaming, “Mike, we have to make It small! Make It feel small!”

And somehow, they do. They shrink it down until it’s the size of a baby, essentially chanting “clown, clown, clown,” and if it wasn’t so goddamn serious, Richie would be laughing his fucking ass off. I mean, if this was all it took to kill this fucker, they could have done it in 5 minutes back in 1989. Hands tied behind their backs. Hell, Richie probably could have done it on his own, all of them could’ve, except maybe Ben. Nobody’s meaner than a middle school kid. *Maybe that’s why Pennywise was trying to kill us all off* .

“Just a fucking clown,” Eddie spits at the weirdly shriveled thing on the ground before them, looking as wild-eyed as he did as a kid when he got all wound up.

It says something about how they’re all grown up now and Richie would punch It in the face if he wasn’t scared It would, like, fucking bite him or something.

“Why us?” He finds himself saying. “You didn’t even fucking know us, we were just kids, and - and you fucked us up forever, and for what? Why did it have to be us?”

“It didn’t,” It says in a small voice. An evil grin starts to spread across

It's face (*can an evil space clown grin any other way?*). "It didn't have to be you at all."

There's a brief pause before Richie screams, "FUCK YOU," almost blind with rage. All this time, he'd half-convinced himself that their role in Derry's killer clown saga was preordained. Yeah, it was a little presumptuous, but it was more comforting to think this was all meant to be, because the alternative was that this was all just a cosmic coincidence, and that was almost sickening to consider.

But now he knows for sure and that knowledge is practically choking him, because it *could* have been anyone. It could have been *anyone* . It didn't have to be them. They could have been normal. Well, as close to normal as anyone gets these days. But they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and now there's a lifetime of fucked up shit between who they were and who they are now and it's just so, so unfair.

Before he knows what's doing, he rips one of It's stupid spider legs right off and stabs it, stabs it as hard as It had stabbed Eddie in his deadlights vision, stabs it over and over again. "Fuck! You! You! Fucking! Clown!"

He doesn't stop until he feels Bev's hands on his arm.

"Richie, honey," she says softly, and that's all it takes. He drops the spider leg (*so fucking gross, holy shit, I'm gonna pull an Eddie after this and disinfect my hand like nobody's business*) and steps back. Mike is looking at him carefully and Richie knows he's worrying about him. *We're subterranean with an ancient evil alien clown and he still finds the time to worry about me. Too fucking good for this stupid world* .

Bill takes the initiative to plunge his hand in It's chest and rip It's heart out. He doesn't even need to tell them what to do; they all instinctively place their own hands over the heart and squeeze, squeeze until they felt that familiar, black slime flowing over their fingers.

The cave starts to crumble around them, just like Richie saw in the deadlights, but this time he's not being dragged out, screaming and crying. This time, he grabs Eddie's hand and they run and somehow,

some way, they get out before the whole house comes crumbling down on their heads.

The six of them stand in the street and watch the house disintegrate, the same way they used to stand there before Bill delivered some rousing speech that would convince them to go inside. *No more field trips to Neibolt*, Richie thinks, and he can't help himself; he laughs.

Bev turns to look at him, the rest of the Losers following suit.

"Are you having a nervous breakdown?" Eddie says matter-of-factly, and this causes Richie to laugh even harder.

"I-I was just thinking," he gasps out. "Wasn't that shithole a historical landmark? W-what's the Derry Historical Preservation Society gonna have to say about this?"

He expects them all to continue staring at him blankly. He knows he's having a pretty strange reaction to cheating death for the hundredth time, but he can't help it. This is how he deals with shit.

And then he hears Mike snort. He looks up at him.

"He's right," Mike says helplessly at Ben's questioning look. "It was a historical landmark."

And suddenly they're all laughing, laughing so hard they're falling all over each other, leaning on each other's shoulders, and Richie thinks, *This. This was what was missing all those years.*

Eddie's hand on his shoulder interrupts his thoughts.

"We won," he says simply, and Richie feels like his heart is gonna explode out of his chest because they did, didn't they? They won and now they get to keep on living, except this time, with the promise of each other.

Before he can stop himself, Richie throws his arms around Eddie and pulls him close, hugging him as tight as he could because he's still kinda-sorta convinced that he's floating in the deadlights and maybe holding on to the one real thing he's ever known will help with that. Eddie's arms wrap around Richie just as tightly and they're laughing,

they're both laughing because *fuck* , they made it and suddenly Richie is crying.

"Whoa, whoa, hey," Eddie pulls back to look at Richie's face, which is now contorted into an ugly-crying face that would rival Kim Kardashian's. "Hey, we're okay. We're all okay."

"I know, I know," he finally chokes out, trying to get his shit together. "It's just....."

"We know, Rich," Ben says quietly, carefully placing his hand on Richie's shoulder. Bev slips an arm around his waist. Bill and Mike hover behind him.

So they stand there as the dust settles on Neibolt Street and Richie cries his fucking eyes out because for the first time in a really long fucking time, everything is fine and it's kind of a shock to the system, you know?

"Fuck," he says after a few minutes. "This is embarrassing."

"Y-you've done w-w-worse," Bill reminds him.

"Way to kick a guy while he's down, Billiam."

"Let's get out of here," Bev interjects. She's studying the empty place where the house used to be, a faraway look in her eyes.

"And where, pray tell, do monster hunters go to celebrate a successful day at the office, Ms. Marsh?"

Bev sticks her tongue out at him before grabbing Ben's hand (he looks like he's died and gone to heaven) and heading down the street.

"Try to keep up, Trashmouth."

His friends all start walking, but Richie stays put for a few seconds, watching them all. They look like shit. They look like superheroes.

"You coming?" Eddie's voice startles him out of his reverie. He's smiling, the soft smile that was only reserved for Richie - at least,

that's how Richie remembers it. *What if, after all of this, what if we-*

"Yeah," Richie grins, running a hand through his hair. "Yeah, I'm coming."

This is what's real. This is what I'm going to hold onto and I'm never letting go again.

"Hey, Eds, wait up!"

And to Richie's surprise, he does.

15. afterglow

tell me that you're still mine

They end up at the quarry.

Should have known that was where she would take us , Eddie thinks.
This is where she really became a part of things that summer.

They all watch as Bev jumps, just as fearless as she was at 13. Everyone follows suit until it's just him and Richie. *Seems like it always is .*

"Well?"

Eddie turns his eyes from the water far below to Richie's expectant face.

"Well, what?"

"Aren't you gonna jump?"

"It's a lot higher than I remember it being."

"Aw, come on, we used to do this all the time!" Richie groans. "How are you scared of it now?"

"We were kids then," Eddie says, looking back down at the water and his friends' heads. "We didn't know any better."

"Sometimes I think I knew more then than I do now."

Eddie doesn't say anything. He can feel that Richie has more to say and an interruption from him would just lead to jokes and probably Richie shoving him off the cliff.

"I saw something," he finally continues. "In the deadlights, I mean."

"Richie, you don't have to tell m-"

“Yeah, I do, actually,” he laughs ruefully. “It’s important.”

“Okay.”

“I saw you die,” Richie meets his eyes and Eddie is surprised to see how upset he is. “You got stabbed by one of those stupid spider legs and - and you died and we just - we just *left* you down there-”

“You left me?” Eddie can’t help himself; he’s a little pissed. “You left my body in that fucking cave with an evil clown corpse?”

“Hey, I didn’t want to!” Richie raises his hands defensively. “I was kicking and screaming, Mike and Ben had to *drag* me out of there, so don’t act like I didn’t-”

“They had to drag you out?” And just like that, all Eddie’s anger dissipates.

“Well,” Richie rubs the back of his neck, looking embarrassed. “Yeah. I mean, I was pretty, um, upset, I guess you could say.”

Eddie doesn’t say anything. He can read Richie like a book and he knows a verbal explosion is coming in three, two, one-

“Look, I was devastated, okay? Because I had a bad feeling something like that would happen, which is why I made you promise to stay out of shit, but of course you had to fucking *save* me! And then you died and it was - it was awful because sure, I didn’t have you for 27 years, but I remembered what it was like when I did and I had to lose you again and I didn’t even-”

“Richie, Richie, breathe,” Eddie puts his hands on his shoulders, trying to get him to slow down. “Calm down, for, like, one fucking second.”

“You were dead,” he says helplessly. “You were gone and there was nothing I could do about it, just like when you left the first time, and God, I hate feeling like that!”

“Okay, but I didn’t die. We made it out and we *won* .”

“I know, but I still feel all,” Richie gestured vaguely at his abdomen.

“Gross. Nervous. Pukey.”

“We *just* defeated our literal childhood demon, give it a few days.”

Richie laughs, just barely, but it’s enough. And then he sighs, and Eddie can tell there’s something on his mind that he doesn’t quite know how to say. *It’s scary how much I know about him* .

“You ever wonder what would’ve happened if you hadn’t moved?” He smiles, but there’s hurt in his eyes and Eddie knows they’re remembering the same day, the movers and their friends’ sad smiles and one last desperate kiss in an empty house.

“Yeah. Yeah, I do.”

“I think we would’ve stayed together,” Richie says thoughtfully. “All through high school. Wouldn’t be able to take you to prom, but we would’ve kissed under the bleachers. I probably would’ve spiked the punch bowl at some point and you would’ve pretended to be mad at me, but you’d secretly think it was funny.”

“Rich-”

“And we would’ve gone to college together,” Richie keeps going, almost like he can’t hear Eddie. “Somewhere in New York, I think. You’d get great grades and I’d always be on the verge of flunking out and we’d fight because you’d think I was wasting my potential, but we’d never be mad at each other for long.”

“Come on, don’t-”

“We could’ve been happy,” he finishes, then shrugs lightly. “Really happy, I think. Isn’t that awful?”

“What, that we would’ve been happy?”

“No, that we *could* have been happy.”

Eddie looks out over the quarry. He’s had an okay life. Not great, but not terrible. The kind of life you can look at and say “He’s doing fine.” He had thought for so long that that was the only kind of life he needed, but now here was Richie, painting a picture of the life

that might have been. *Could* have been.

Eddie Kaspbrak has never considered himself a brave man, but he's just fought a killer clown from space and *won* , so he thinks that maybe he's safe in changing that assumption. He is brave, which is why he looks at Richie and says, "We still could be."

Richie's eyes meet his, and suddenly his face breaks into a smile so wide it takes up most of his face (which is saying something, because Richie's head is huge).

"Hey!" Bev's voice floats up from down below. "Are you guys coming, or what?"

"Y-yeah, Rich, have you c-convincing Eddie to j-j-ump yet?"

Richie looks over at him, that same beautiful smile still lighting up his tired face. "Whaddaya say, Eds? You ready to take the plunge?"

He sticks out his hand and Eddie thinks, *All these years and we still belong to each other* . He grabs Richie's hand. *Mine. Never letting go* .

"Yeah, I'm ready."

And before he can blink, they are plummeting towards water, the sounds of their friends' cheers echoing in his ears before he goes under. He surfaces quickly, taking a deep, shuddery breath. Richie is right next to him. He's still smiling and Eddie's heart kicks into high gear, just like when they were kids.

He and Richie are still holding hands. Eddie doesn't plan on letting go anytime soon.

16. ME!

i know that i'm a handful, baby

Going back to the hotel feels so incredibly weird that Richie can hardly find the words for it. It's not the hotel itself; it's the circumstances. They spent the night in an underground cave fighting a clown older than time itself and now the bored teenager at the front desk is asking them if they need extra towels in their rooms.

"I wonder if anyone's seen the blood in my bathroom," Eddie mutters.

"I think that kid would've had a lot more questions for us if the cleaning ladies had seen the whole Bates-Motel situation in there," Richie says, relishing in the fact that they can joke about this shit now.

"I wonder if anyone's found Bowers yet," Mike says darkly, which wipes the smile right off Richie's face.

"Oh, fuck," he squeezes his eyes shut. "I killed him."

"Sure did."

"Think I'll be able to skip town before they figure out it was me?"

"Richie, you can't-"

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding," he says quickly (he hadn't been kidding).

"I w-wonder if maybe he d-d-disappeared," Bill says thoughtfully. "With It."

"Yeah, but Bowers wasn't a demon clown," Bev reminds him, sliding her key in the door and ushering them all into her room. None of them wanted to be alone right now.

"I know, b-b-but he sort of....." Bill hesitates. "Became part of It."

Intertwined.”

Richie notes that Bill’s stutter is getting better than it was before; another sign that this whole shitshow is drawing to a close.

“Well, if he’s still at the library, I’ll be the first person they call,” Mike sighs. “But until then, I really need some fucking sleep.”

“I second that,” Ben collapses onto the bed, Bev following close behind.

“Hey, why do you guys get the bed?” Richie whines. “Just because you’re beautiful doesn’t mean you get everything, you know.”

“It’s my room,” Bev points out.

“Details, details.”

Mike ends up joining Bev and Ben on the bed. Bill takes the couch, which leaves Richie and Eddie on the floor with all of the extra pillows and blankets they managed to guilt everyone else out of. They all fall asleep quickly, except for Richie. At all of their sleepovers, he was always the last one to go to sleep and the last one to wake up.

It’s all so achingly familiar, Richie half expects to hear Mrs. Denbrough calling “Hey, lights out means lights out, everybody!” from downstairs.

“Shouldn’t you be wearing, like, Spider-Man pajamas and a retainer?” Richie whispers to Eddie.

“Didn’t get braces until after Derry,” he murmurs sleepily, eyes closed.

“Can’t believe I missed out on you being a brace face.”

“You missed out on a lot, don’t worry about it.”

“But I’m not gonna miss out on anything anymore,” Richie props himself up on his elbows, studying Eddie in the dark. “Right?”

Eddie doesn't say anything for a moment; just long enough for Richie to start rethinking everything and wondering if there's still time to drown himself in the quarry.

"Eds?"

"Hm?" Eddie sounds groggy.

"Did you seriously fall asleep while I was talking?"

"Richie, I am very tired. I still smell like a sewer, even after 4 showers. There is a hole in my face. Do we really need to talk right now?"

"I just-" The words stick in his throat. He doesn't know how to say it all, how to say it right; his overwhelming love for Eddie, his crippling fear that it'll all be some sick joke, his worry that he'll end up alone every time, no matter what he does.

Because that's what it always boils down to, right? The fear that he isn't enough, at least on his own. Hence, the voices and the obnoxious shirts and the wild hair. If he's larger than life, he can take up space in people's minds. They'll remember him and, even if they hate him, they still remember and that's all he needs.

And then he hears Eddie scoot over, feels him burrow into his chest. Richie can't breathe and it's weird because he knows they did this a hundred times before and yet, it still feels as miraculous as it did the first time.

"You're a nuisance," Eddie declares, but there's no malice in his voice. It's a sentiment that Eddie's expressed a million different times before, in a myriad of different ways, but this one is Richie's favorite. When Eddie says "you're a nuisance" in that tone, he's really saying "you're *my* nuisance, you're *my* idiot, you're *my* disaster," etc, etc.

"I know," Richie says softly. "A real handful, huh?"

"If that's the beginning of some god awful dick joke-"

"It's not!"

“Just stop thinking,” Eddie mumbles. “And go to sleep. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

“But what if-”

“Tomorrow,” Eddie says firmly and Richie is surprised to feel a lump in his throat. Maybe it’s the knowledge that there *is* a tomorrow for them, even after everything they’ve been through. Maybe it’s the realization that he doesn’t have to be alone anymore, not if he doesn’t want to be (and he doesn’t want to be, God, he never wants to be alone again). Or maybe it’s just having Eddie lay here next to him and knowing that he’s alive and real and breathing and that Richie can reach out and touch him, just the way he did all those years before.

“Tomorrow,” Richie repeats, and it sounds like a promise.

17. it's nice to have a friend

light pink sky

up on the roof

sun sinks down

no curfew

In the following days, the rest of the Losers slowly trickle out of Derry. First, Bill.

"I have to see Audra," he explains, even though he doesn't need to; she's his wife, of course he has to get back to her. "I have to try and come up with something to tell her, and the producers, too."

"Just tell 'em you had a nervous breakdown," Richie unhelpfully supplies. "That's what I told my manager and now I've got the rest of the month off."

Bill just flips him off.

He leaves the next day, and Eddie is surprised at how hard it is to say goodbye. He knows that they're not going to forget this time, can feel it deep in his bones, but the fear is still there and he can't shake it.

Ben and Bev are next, to no one's surprise.

"I've got a lot of shit to sort out," Bev grimaces, but there's a happy light in her eyes that tells Eddie she's happy to sort it out, happy that she *can* sort it out, and with Ben by her side the whole time.

"Well then, get to sorting," Eddie smiles, before pulling her into a hug.

"Yeah, and Haystack, if you ever get tired of Molly Ringwald over here, you know who to call," Richie winks, before Bev elbows him sharply. "Oof," he groans. "I miss the days when you would just flip

me the bird. More ladylike.”

“I’ll show you ladylike,” she grumbles, but then she throws her arms around his neck and says, “Call me, okay? Whenever. And Ben’s got a place in LA for business, so we’ll visit.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Yes,” Ben says soberly, before cracking a small grin. Sometimes Eddie forgets just how funny he can be.

So they leave, Bev riding shotgun in Ben’s pickup truck (“such a fucking cliché, Haystack, I swear”), and to Eddie, it looks like that’s where she’s always belonged. He looks up at Richie, who is waving at them with one hand, the other arm slung around Eddie’s shoulder.

He thinks that maybe he’s right where he belongs, too.

So then it’s just Mike, Richie, and Eddie.

Eddie doesn’t know why he hasn’t left yet. Doesn’t know why Richie hasn’t left yet, either. There’s just something that’s holding him here, but not in the way it used to. Instead of feeling tied up, held down, choking on memories, Eddie feels.....peaceful. He walks down the street and sure, there’s the alleyway where Henry Bowers and his gang kicked the shit out of him, but then there’s the park bench Bev pushed Richie off of, breaking his wrist in the process and making Eddie laugh until he cried at the dumbfounded expression on Richie’s face. Of course, he stopped laughing after Richie had said faintly, “Um, I think maybe someone should take me to the doctor,” and - after some bickering - Richie ended up riding Eddie’s handlebars to the doctor’s office.

Good memories and bad memories, twining together to form the strands of Eddie’s life. The life he never really knew he had. So maybe that’s why he couldn’t go just yet. He needed to make sure he got it all firmly cemented in his head.

At first, Richie had claimed that he was only sticking around to make sure he wasn’t gonna get charged for murder, but as the days passed and Bowers’ body never showed up, it became pretty easy to accept

Bill's theory that he had disappeared along with It.

Eddie knew he would only stay as long as Eddie was there. It sort of made him feel queasy, but in a good way. He'd dated before (he might have forgotten the specifics of coming out, but he never forgot that he had), but he'd never felt this way about another guy before. And yeah, he and Richie had a shitload of shared trauma and emotional baggage, plus they were each other's one-that-got-away, so it was kinda hard for anyone else to compete, but Eddie had a feeling that even without all of that, they'd have been drawn to each other.

After two weeks in Derry, the day finally came; Mike was leaving. Eddie wasn't surprised. He and Richie had been helping Mike pack up his house for the last few days, taping boxes and taking stuff to Goodwill and bubble-wrapping breakables. Seeing Mike's excitement to leave Derry, his self-imposed prison sentence finally up, was enough to make even Eddie giddy.

"So, what are you gonna do once you get down to the Sunshine State, Mikey Boy?" Richie was stretched out on one of those shitty-porch-furniture couches, trying to drink his beer while laying down (and failing). Mike was leaving the next morning and they were celebrating by getting drunk on the roof of the hotel, where Eddie and Richie were still proud patrons ("When we leave, they're gonna put a plaque on the door of my room, commemorating my stay." "More like a warning sign for anyone who was thinking about sleeping in that room").

"A whole lot of nothing," Mike smiles, looking off into the distance.

"You deserve it," Eddie says, and although it sounds cheesy, he means it. He still marvels at the fact that Mike gave up his entire life for this. For them. *Mike was always the best of us*, he thinks, taking a sip from his drink.

"You're gonna love the outside world," Richie is sitting up now, cheeks red from the booze, eyes slightly unfocused. "Jesus, you're gonna be like one of those motherfuckers from *Breaking Amish*. What's that thing they do? Humdinger?"

"Rumspringa," Mike snorts.

"You're so smart, Mr. Hanlon," Richie affects a fluttery, flirty tone. "And handsome, too. How are you still single?"

"I blame the Zodiac-killer apartment I've been living in."

"Yeah, chicks don't dig cork boards with red string connecting pictures of dead people."

"Speaking from experience?"

"Yup."

They all laugh, even though it wasn't particularly funny. Eddie blames the alcohol.

They hang out for another hour, watching the sun start to sink, before Mike announces he's going.

"Gotta get a good night's sleep," he speaks loudly over Richie's protestations. "I'm leaving early tomorrow morning."

"Are you gonna come by and say goodbye?" Eddie says, before he even realizes he's saying it. He doesn't want Mike to just disappear into the night. He still can't shake the feeling that all of this will go up in smoke as soon as they cross the county line.

"I will if you want me to."

"We do," Richie says firmly, clapping a hand on Mike's shoulder. "As long as it's not before 9 am. Eds here needs his beauty sleep."

"Fuck off," Eddie snaps reflexively, before turning to Mike. "Come by as early as you like. We want to say goodbye."

Mike smiles, gives them both hugs, and leaves. *Just me and Richie now* .

"So," Richie sighs. "Is it finally time for us to peace the fuck out of the Twilight Zone?"

"Yeah," Eddie says thoughtfully, studying the sky, turned pink by the setting sun. "I think we can go now."

“Thank fucking God.”

“Hey, no one wanted Mike to be left behind again and you and I were the only ones without immediate, pressing obligations.”

“Oh yeah, ‘cause Bev and Ben had an immediate and pressing obligation to fuck.”

“She has to start divorce proceedings, asshole.”

Richie chuckles, which is a weird reaction to a discussion about their friend’s divorce, but that was Richie. Eddie suddenly remembers Richie telling them his grandpa died. Instead of saying it like a normal person, he said, “Yep, ol’ grandpappy Tozier decided to open up a worm farm last night. Really putting everything into it. Heart, soul, body.” He then dissolved into laughter before the rest of the Losers could even figure out what the hell he was talking about. It was like he couldn’t process bad things unless he somehow found a way to laugh about it.

“I hope Bev takes him to the fucking cleaners.”

“I don’t think she cares about all that,” Eddie nudges him lightly with his shoulder. “She just wants it all to be over.”

Richie hums lightly in agreement before putting his arm around Eddie’s shoulder. They’re silent for a little while, until Richie - always Richie - speaks up.

“So, where are we headed, Eds?”

“Huh?”

“You know,” Richie looks at him, brow furrowed. “After all this is over. Wanna come to LA with me? I’ve got a sweet pad.”

“Sweet pad?”

“Or we could go back to New York,” Richie’s words are tumbling out faster and faster, which is how Eddie can tell he’s nervous.

“Richie-”

“Or, hell, we could crash Mike’s great Floridian odyssey, I don’t think he’d mind, right? He needs company.”

“Hey, slow down,” Eddie grabs Richie’s face with both of his hands and the sudden contact gets Richie to screech to a halt.

Eddie takes a moment to look at him, just look at him. His glasses are smudged, his lips are chapped, and he needs to shave. A mess, as usual. He’s the best thing Eddie’s ever seen.

“Can I tell you what I’ve been planning?” he says quietly. Richie just nods. “Okay. So, we’ll go to New York. I need to wrap things up there and get some of my shit. I’m renting, so I don’t need to worry about my apartment. Well, the lease isn’t up until - you know what, doesn’t matter, I’ll take a loss on that.”

“Wow, big spender over here.”

“Shut up,” Eddie, hands still on Richie’s face, shakes him back and forth lightly. “After that, we go to LA. I’ll find a job pretty easily. Lots of earthquakes out there, lots of need for a risk analyst.”

Richie’s mouth is open, but no sound is coming out. *Fuck, I think I broke his brain .*

“Oh, and I’m gonna move in with you. That’s cool, right?”

Richie answers by surging forward and kissing him. Eddie is so surprised that it takes him a minute to kiss back. As soon as he does, though, Richie pulls back.

“That’s cool, right?” he says, in a terrible imitation of Eddie’s voice. “Fucking hell, of course it’s cool, I literally just asked you if you wanted to come back to my sweet LA pad.”

“If you keep calling it a sweet pad, I’m not coming.”

Richie just kisses him again and, not for the first time, Eddie thinks “*This is what I’ve been missing ,*” and gets pissed all over again that a demented magic clown stole 30 years from them.

They end up sitting next to each other on the shitty-porch-furniture

couch, Eddie tucked into Richie's side. It's new and familiar all at the same time and Eddie wonders if that feeling is ever gonna go away.

They watch the sun go down, the cotton candy pink slowly fading from the sky until it's a deep purple, then black. Eddie doesn't ever want to move, but then he remembers they're still in fucking Derry and he decides that maybe moving wouldn't be such a bad idea.

"Remember when we used to know all the constellations and drive Stan crazy by screaming them out all the time?"

"I still know some of them."

"Me, too. And I can still find Uranus, so-"

"I'm gonna kill you."

"Okay," and Richie sounds so happy, Eddie thinks his heart is going to explode.

"It's weird - well, everything is weird - but it's weird to be out at night and not have somewhere to be. Like, no one's calling us home. No curfews."

"Like we ever listened to our parents about curfews anyway."

"This place makes me feel like a kid again," Eddie shrugs. "I just keep feeling like we've got school in the morning, or a camp out in the Barrens to bike over to."

"I think everyone sort of feels like that when they go back to their childhood home."

"Yeah, but does everyone cement the bonds of their friendships by killing a demon clown?"

"You got me there, Eds."

They lapse back into silence. Eddie absentmindedly slips his hand into Richie's. He feels.....at peace. For the first time in what feels like forever, Eddie Kaspbrak feels like he has everything he has ever wanted. And yeah, he didn't expect everything he ever wanted to be

wrapped up in a 6'2, messy-haired, stand-up comedian, but he wasn't complaining. It felt right. It *was* right.

"Hey."

"Yeah?"

"I love you," Eddie says casually, ignoring the choking sound coming from Richie's throat. "I don't think I mentioned that before."

"Uh," Richie coughs. "No. No, you did not mention that before."

Eddie pauses for a beat, then says, "Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Aren't you gonna say it back?"

"It back," Richie says, one of his stupid, shit-eating grins on his face. Eddie punches his shoulder.

"Fuck you, Tozier."

"Eds, Eds," he's laughing now and Eddie wants to be mad, but he can't, not when Richie is smiling like that. "Eds, of course I love you! I thought that was obvious."

"Yeah, but it's still nice to hear."

"Edward Kaspbrak," Richie puts his hands on Eddie's cheeks, turning his head to face him. "I love you. Have for a long time. I want you to come to LA with me and bleach every square inch of my house and make me eat whole wheat bread-"

"You still eat white bread?"

"-and yell at me for leaving the windows open during pollen season," Richie finishes, not even acknowledging Eddie's interjection. "I love you *that* much. So, stop being pissy, okay?"

"You're an idiot," Eddie rolls his eyes, but he's smiling. They both are.

Sure, they're not kids anymore. They're not old yet, but they sure as hell aren't young. But that's okay. They're together, and that's enough. More than enough.

18. daylight

i only see daylight

The sky is a bright, clear blue on the day that they leave. They'd seen Mike off earlier that morning, so early that there will stars in the sky and Richie couldn't get his eyes to open fully. As soon as Mike's car rounds the corner, Eddie drags him back upstairs and shoves him back into the bed.

Richie wakes up a few hours later, rolling over to fling his arm across Eddie's chest except - Eddie isn't there. Richie feels his heart kick into high gear before he fully processes the sound of the shower and Eddie's absentminded humming.

He's still here , he thinks breathlessly. *We're okay. We're okay* .

Eddie comes out of the bathroom a few minutes later, already fully dressed.

"Oh, good, you're up," he says, crossing the room to throw his toiletry bag in his suitcase. "Let's get the fuck out of here."

"You mean you *don't* want to spend a few more days walking the streets where we were once terrorized by a demonic sewer clown?"

"I'm giving you 30 minutes. If you're not in the car by then, I'm leaving without you."

"Love you, too."

Eddie doesn't say anything, but Richie can see his cheeks getting red. He loves doing that. He loves that he *gets* to do that. He loves Eddie.

Richie cuts it pretty close, but he manages to be in the car 30-ish minutes later.

"I can't believe you were *actually* driving away!"

“ I can’t believe you opened the door of a moving vehicle!” Eddie yells, hands clenched around the steering wheel. “I wasn’t *actually* gonna leave, it was a *joke* -”

“How ‘bout you leave the joking to the professional here?” Richie grins.

“Fuck you, you fucking hack, with your fucking ghostwriters-”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Richie puts his hands up defensively. “First of all, I’m not a hack, I’m a phony. There is a difference, I assure you.”

Eddie looks at him, regret written on his face. “Rich, I didn’t-”

“Second of all,” Richie steamrolls over what was sure to have been an apology on Eddie’s end and he doesn’t want to hear it. One, because there’s no need for one, and two, because Richie likes it when Eddie’s mean. “Those fucking ghostwriters are being fired once we get to LA and I can convince my manager to let me do this.”

“Do what?”

“Write my own stuff,” he shrugs, suddenly shy. “Do my own thing. Be myself.”

He hadn’t even realized that was the plan, hadn’t thought it all the way through yet, but saying it out loud like that felt right. Richie could never really put his finger on why he’d let his manager talk him into going to a writing team. He’d been funny enough to get people’s attention then; how come once he actually got famous for his jokes, people started telling him he needed someone else’s?

“I think that’s a really great idea,” Eddie says, reaching over to grab one of Richie’s hands and twine their fingers together. “Like, maybe your best idea.”

“Glad you approve, Eds.”

They make their way slowly through Derry (Eddie likes to drive 5 miles under the speed limit in residential areas, which makes Richie want to tear his hair out until he remembers that Eddie drives 15 miles over on the freeways). Richie stares out the window, watching

all the people go about their daily lives and thinks, “Do you know what we did for this town? Do you know what it took for us to save the day one final time?” But of course they don’t. No one ever will, except for the Losers. That’s enough. It’s always been enough.

“What are you thinking about?”

Richie turns to look at Eddie and feels his heart skip a beat. It’s been doing that so much lately he wonders if he needs to visit a cardiologist once they get home.

“I’m thinking about how happy I am,” he says simply squeezing Eddie’s hand lightly. “Also about how you’re gonna have a rage-induced stroke when you see my house.”

“Is it really that bad?”

“Two words, Eds: velvet Elvis.”

As Eddie makes gagging noises, Richie just stares at him, an adoring smile on his face (he can literally *feel* it, it’s so fucking *sappy*, but he can’t help himself). The sun is coming through the driver’s side window and it fills the car, touching him and Eddie. For a second, it’s all he can see.

Eddie turns to smile at him. It’s more blinding than the sunlight, but in all the best ways possible.

As they pass the “Leaving Derry! Come Back Soon!” sign, they both cheer and Richie suddenly knows with a strange clarity that, although he’s been in the dark for a long time, he gets to live in the light now.

Notes for the Chapter:

and that's it! thanks for all your kind words as i wrote this and thank you for reading!